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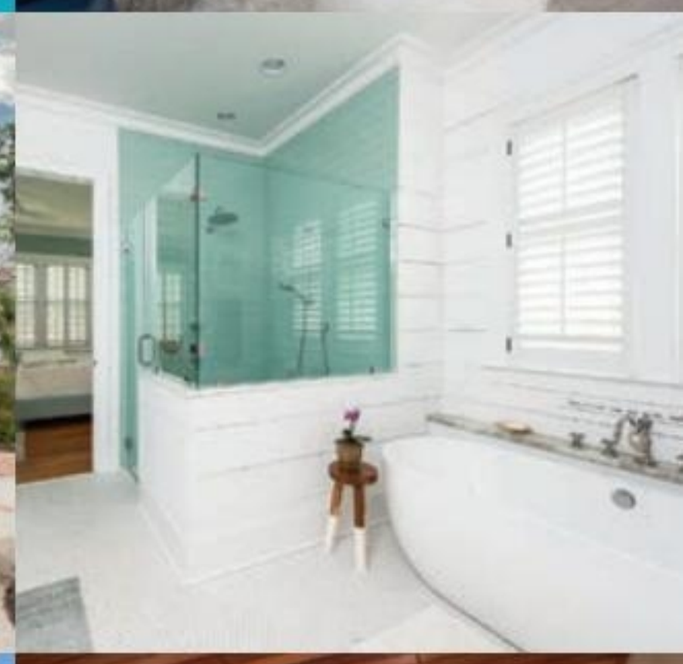

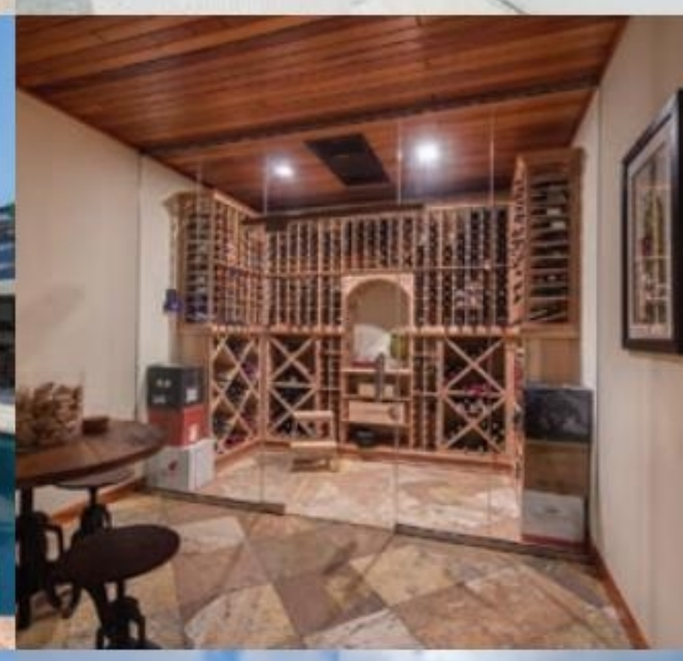

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137 Hallbrook Farms Circle · Porters Neck Plantation · $658,000

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8300 Fazio Drive · Porters Neck Plantation · $565,000

Enjoy this prime location with easy access to the Intracoastal Waterway including a community boat ramp and a picnic area. This custom built residence features an open floor plan with high ceilings and over sized windows. Revel in the natural light and views of the Fazio designed 17th green as well as the private, well landscaped yard.

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2004 Montrose Lane · Landfall · $1,150,000

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805 Gull Point Road · Landfall · $859,000

Located in the quiet cul-de-sac of one of Landfall's prettiest streets, Gull Point Road, this true post and beam home is tucked down a tree-lined winding driveway and borders the scenic tidal Howe Creek with soaring ceilings, open floor plan and floor to ceiling windows.

2218 Tattersalls Drive · Glen Meade · $514,000

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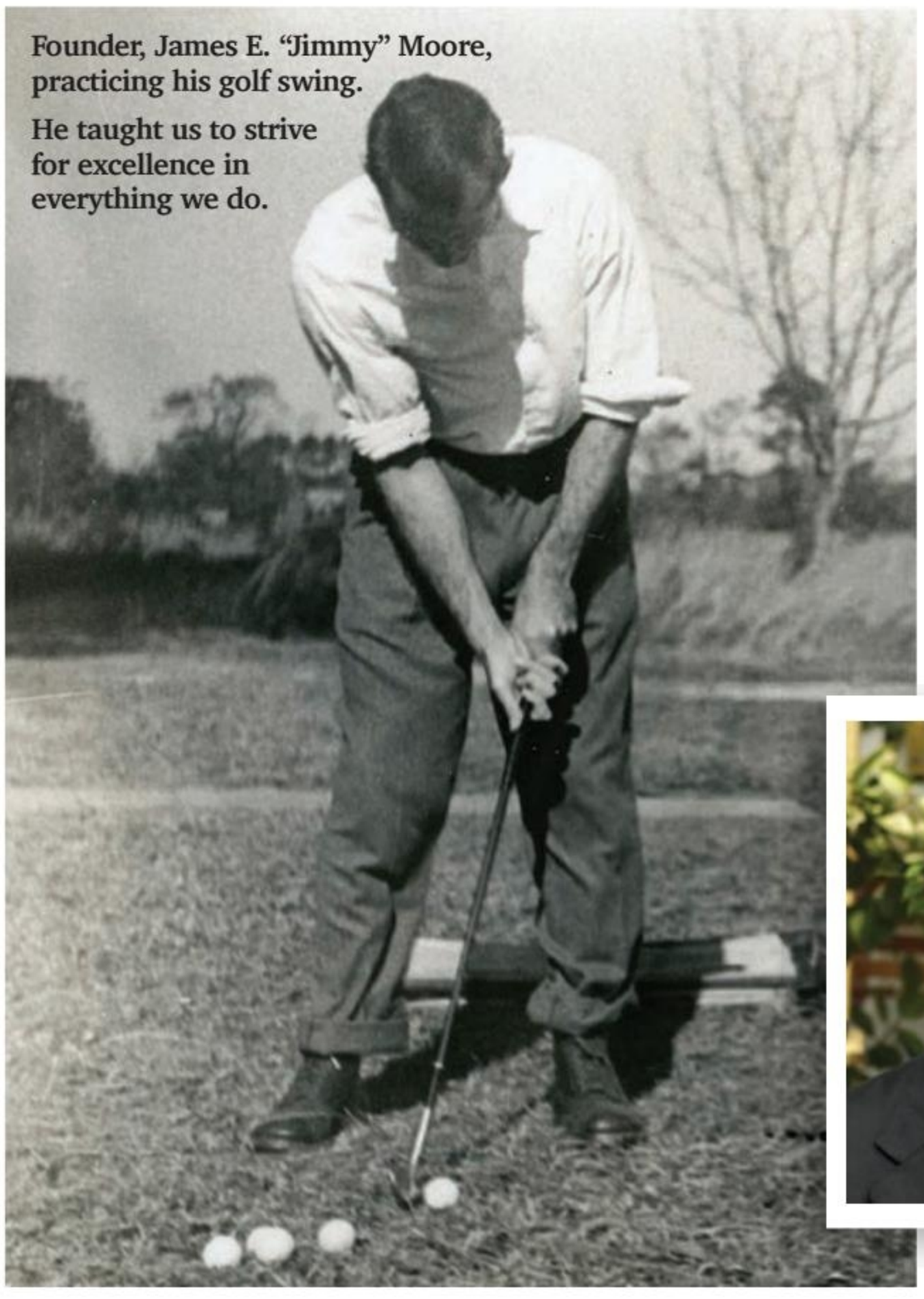

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May 2018

Features

43 The Arborist
Poetry by Paul Lamar

44 On the Black River
Story & Photographs by John Wolfe
Ancient trees and bathing in the world of our ancestors

48 The Power of a Porch
By Virginia Holman
My husband and I linger for hours on ours. But it's been a lengthy journey to get here

50 The Four Masters
By Jim Dodson
An enduring springtime ritual shared by a quartet of golf-loving friends from Charolotte to the Cape Fear

54 Gallery
Photographs by Toren Davis

60 A Sacred Space
By William Irvine
Deep in the woods of Forest Hills, Jodie Rippy has created an elegant sanctuary for her art

67 Almanac
By Ash Alder

Departments

15 Simple Life
By Jim Dodson

20 SaltWorks

23 Omnivorous Reader
By Stephen E. Smith

27 Lunch With a Friend
By Dana Sachs

31 In the Spirit
By Tony Cross

35 Food For Thought
By Jane Lear

39 Accidental Southerner
By Nan Graham

41 Birdwatch
By Susan Campbell

69 Calendar

74 Port City People

79 Accidental Astrologer
By Astrid Stellanova

80 Papadaddy's Mindfield
By Clyde Edgerton

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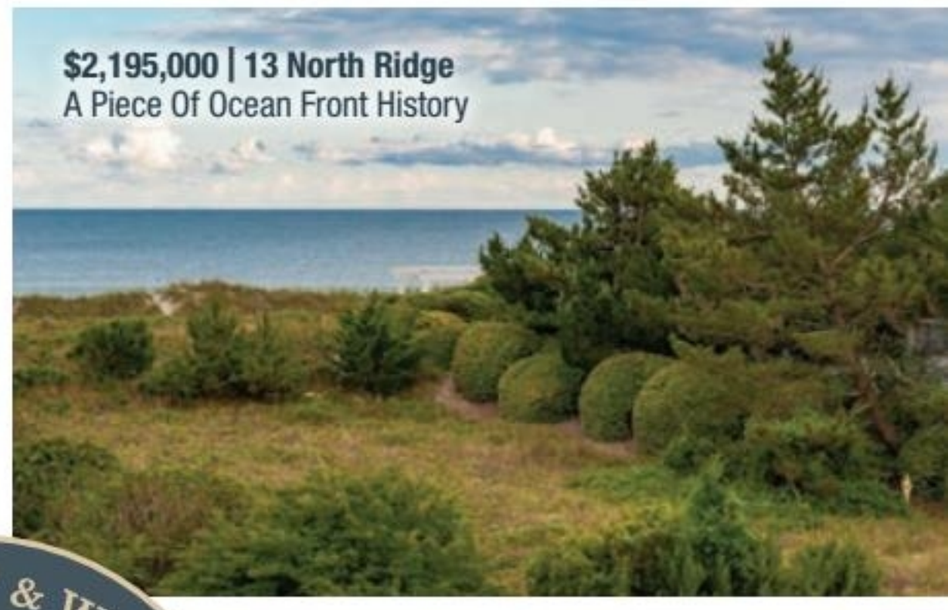

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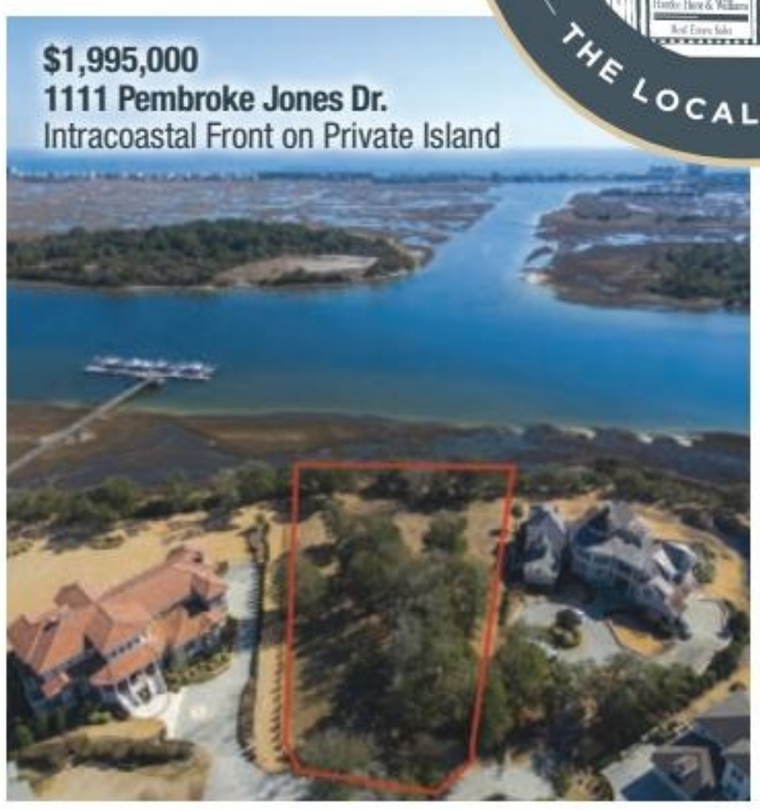

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The Dash of Life

Savoring time between the beginning and the inevitable

ILLUSTRATION BY ROMEY PETITE

By Jim Dodson

At the beginning of Episode Two of my favorite British TV program of the moment, a charming series called *Delicious*, the central character, a roguish head chef, speaking from his grave in a Cornwall churchyard, recalls a famous poet's observation about the symbolism of markings in stone.

"On a gravestone you see two dates — a beginning and an end, with a tiny dash in between. That dash represents everything you've ever done. Everywhere you've ever been. Every breath kiss or meal. It all boils down to just one little dash. . ."

As a chronic wanderer of old burying grounds and admirer of witty epitaphs, I learned years ago that burying stones "speak," telling tales and offering nuggets of wisdom to those willing to listen.

Most of us, however, are living in a time when daily life seems like a frantic dash from one place to the next. With work ruled by the tyranny of deadlines and calendar books, and private time invaded by social media and the clamors of an info-addicted world, it is often not until one reaches a certain age or experiences some kind of unexpected drama that the need to pause and reflect upon one's own mortality — the meaning of the dash — becomes clear.

One year ago this month, I had my dodgy gall bladder removed. Frankly, I wasn't sorry to see it go. The blessed little thing had been bugging me for years. At the same time, I owe that mysterious little organ a genuine debt of gratitude because in the course of a common preparatory scan, a small growth near my lower intestines was detected. It was nipped out by artful surgical procedure, revealing itself upon analysis to be a slow-growing tumor. Fortunately, the prognosis is excellent. There is only a four-percent probability of recurrence, which means no follow-up therapy is required for the time being.

Life is full of verdicts, large and small. Needless to say, I was relieved by this one and, to be blunt, awakened by it. But for a chance discovery, things could easily have gone a very different direction, as I'd enjoyed the kind of good health one might easily take for granted. In short, I was lucky to have had that aching gall bladder.

But mortality is full of wake-up calls and epiphanies. Wise souls take notice of the changing landscape around them, and sometimes within.

On one hand, I was powerfully reminded of the brevity of my time on this Earth, and on the other, comforted by the fact that I had excellent role models for aging smartly and — begging to differ with poet Dylan Thomas — going gently into that good night. Both my parents had their own run-ins with the dreaded C-word at about my age but never complained and went on to live astonishingly full and happy lives for the next two decades.

Their dashes, in other words, were both robust and well-lived till the end, full of gardens and grandkids, travel and exploration, making

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above: John W. Love, Jr.
Love Perpetually Pregnant Man and Train on Path, 2013

new memories and doing good work, making friends and keeping faith in the sustaining power of human and divine love. My old man worked until he was 80 and moderated the men's Sunday School class at our church for almost a quarter of a century. My Southern mama cooked every week for the church feeding program and worked with homeless families. During the last two decades of their lives, they went to movies and took walks like old lovers, and snuck off to the hills for private weekends away. I took to kidding them that they were behaving like irresponsible teenagers.

More important, when their "Time" finally arrived, their "dash" expired its length — I was fortunate to sit with both at their bedsides as they slipped the bonds of this Earth. Nothing was left unspoken, and they displayed no fear whatsoever about the end of their days or the adventure that lay ahead. Sages of every faith tradition hold that human beings tend to pass away as they have lived their lives.

My father's final words on a sleety March evening were, "Don't worry. It will be fine in the morning. Go kiss your babies." Sure enough, the sun came out at dawn, birthing a beautiful spring day. And I did as instructed.

On a summer afternoon four years later, while sharing a glass of wine on the terrace of her favorite seaside restaurant in Maine, I remarked to my mom that she must really miss my father. She simply smiled. "Of course I do, Honey. But don't worry. I'll see him very soon."

A week or so later, she suffered a stroke and was talking about her grandchildren as her nurse in the ICU changed her sheets moments after I left her. "Your mom's heart monitor suddenly went flat and I looked over at her," she told me later. "Her eyes were closed and she was smiling. I've never seen a more peaceful passing."

Every now and then I stop by the simply dated gravestones of my folks in a beautiful cemetery not far from our house, just to say hello — and thanks for the guidance.

That said, a surprising number of friends my age — I recently turned 65, though I don't feel anywhere close to that — confess amazement over how rapidly their lives are passing, how quickly their days seem to have vanished down the rabbit hole of time. Perhaps they hear the clock of the world in their inner ear. "Is it already Monday again?" quips our dear old pal Susan with a husky laugh. She walks with my wife and me every morning at five, as nature and the neighborhood are both just stirring.

Susan's question is more of an amused observation about the speed of life than a complaint about its brevity. She teaches special-needs minority kids in one of the most disadvantaged

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neighborhoods of the city. And though she herself cracked 65 a few month ahead of me, her bounteous enthusiasm, creativity and passion for doing good work and making a difference in a small person's life are flat-out palpable. She radiates joy and an infectious curiosity about what lies ahead — proof of Poor Richard's admonition that a long life may not be good enough, but a good life is long enough.

As for my part, the older I get, the slower I plan to walk. Part of the reason is creaky knees. As the tortoise proved, slow and steady wins the race — if this life is a race at all.

The other reason for slowing down my dashing life is to see more of the passing landscape. Not long ago, my wife and I began "training" for a walk across Italy from Lucca to Rome this coming September with 50 or so other pilgrims from our church.

During the weekly "practice" hikes around the city at dusk, which are really just a lovely excuse to socialize and drink good wine afterwards, I am invariably somewhere at the rear of the pack, ambling along at my own pace, the aforementioned knees gently complaining with every step, but happy to follow where the others lead. This is a trick I learned early in life, for I've long been something of a solitary traveler, taking my own sweet time to get wherever I'm going.

As the second son of an itinerate newspaperman who hauled his family all over the deep South during some of the region's most turbulent years, I experienced a decidedly solitary boyhood, exploring the woods and fields largely on my own or reading books on a rainy porch. Occasionally I'd check out historic graveyards, battlegrounds and Indian burial mounds with my older brother and father. Dick and I both became Eagle Scouts but were never too keen on the group dynamic. We preferred going our own ways at our own rhythm.

As we passed through one of the city's older neighborhoods on our practice hike the other evening, my bride — chatting pleasantly with other pilgrims as she motored by her slow-footed husband — glanced around and remarked, "You know, I've never seen the city from this angle before. It's quite beautiful, isn't it?"

Indeed it was, and is.

As the sun set, her comment made me think about how slowly I plan to walk across Tuscany this summer, taking in all I can before my "dash" runs out.

Emily Webb Gibb's 's haunting farewell speech from Thornton Wilder's poignant play *Our Town* was also suddenly in my head.

Gibbs is the young heroine who passes away in childbirth and looks tearfully back on a wonderful life and family she fears she may have taken for granted, as the stage manager leads her to join the other spirits in the village cemetery.

". . . They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to get old? . . . I love you all, everything. I can't look at everything hard enough. It goes so fast. . . . We don't have time to look at one another. I didn't realize. All that was going on in life and we never noticed. Take me back — up the hill — to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-bye, Good-bye, world. . . Good-bye, Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths and sleeping and waking up. Oh, Earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?"

May is a lovely time to wander a churchyard, I find. The Earth is in bloom and old stones speak of the need not to dash too quickly through the journey.

Contact Editor Jim Dodson at jim@thepilot.com.

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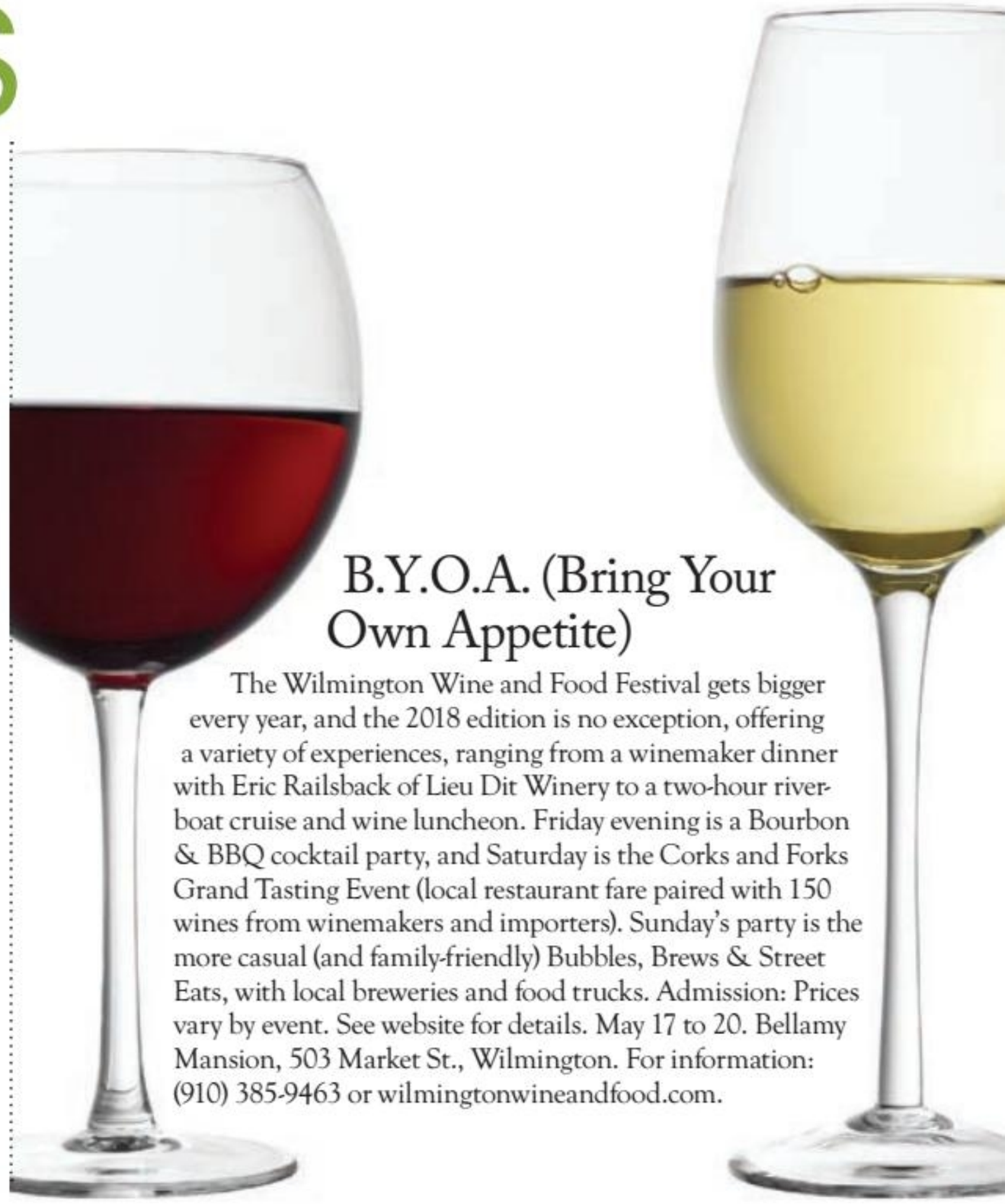
Bluegrass and Barbecue

What could be finer than some great outdoor bluegrass music and a barbecue sandwich? Beats us. St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church is the setting for this year's Cape Fear Bluegrass and BBQ Festival, an all-day celebration of live music, North Carolina-style barbecue, and local craft brews. Featured bands: South of K, Folkestone String Band, Only Mostly, Telluride, Cumberland County Line and Massive Grass. Check website for individual times. A portion of the proceeds benefit Children at Heart, an adoption agency that assists adoptive parents and single mothers. Admission: $10. May 12, 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church, 4601 Blue Clay Road, Castle Hayne. For information: capefearbluegrass.org.



B.Y.O.A. (Bring Your Own Appetite)

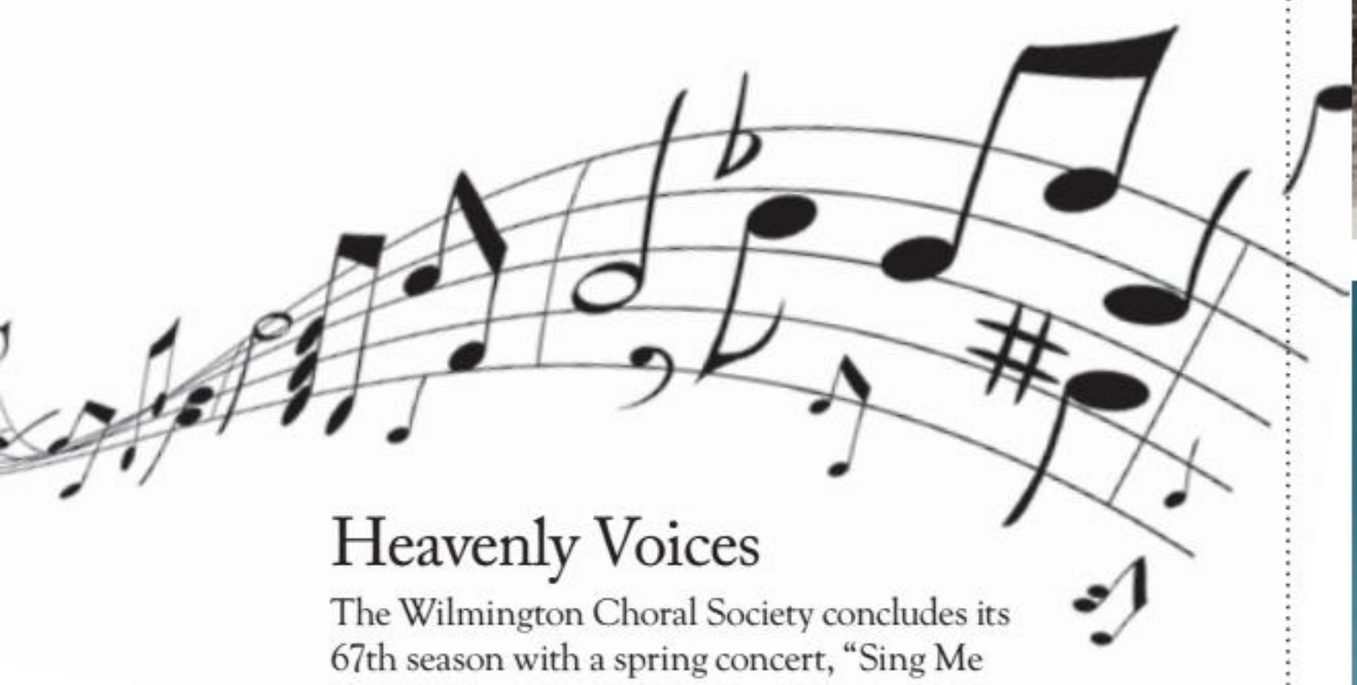
The Wilmington Wine and Food Festival gets bigger every year, and the 2018 edition is no exception, offering a variety of experiences, ranging from a winemaker dinner with Eric Railsback of Lieu Dit Winery to a two-hour river-boat cruise and wine luncheon. Friday evening is a Bourbon & BBQ cocktail party, and Saturday is the Corks and Forks Grand Tasting Event (local restaurant fare paired with 150 wines from winemakers and importers). Sunday's party is the more casual (and family-friendly) Bubbles, Brews & Street Eats, with local breweries and food trucks. Admission: Prices vary by event. See website for details. May 17 to 20. Bellamy Mansion, 503 Market St., Wilmington. For information: (910) 385-9463 or wilmingtonwineandfood.com.

If the Rain Comes…

RAIN began its life in 1975 as a California band called Reign that played its own tunes and covers of Beatles songs. With help from a 1978 appearance on the Jerry Lewis Telethon, they grew to build a reputation as one of the most authoritative interpreters of the Beatles sound. On May 1, celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, one of the Beatles' most acclaimed albums. Tickets: $38-$89. May 1, 7:30 p.m. The Wilson Center, 703 North Third St., Wilmington. Information: (910) 362-7999 or capefearstage.com.

Could It Be Magic?

The Times of London has called The Illusionists "magic's Cirque de Soleil." Direct from Broadway, the world's best-selling magic show for all ages is coming to the Wilson Center, featuring five of the best magicians on Earth, whose talents range from mind reading to comedic magic, illusions and escapology. Tickets: $30 and up. May 13, 4 p.m. The Wilson Center, 703 North Third St., Wilmington. For information: capefearstage.com.



Heavenly Voices

The Wilmington Choral Society concludes its 67th season with a spring concert, "Sing Me to Heaven," featuring John Rutter's *Requiem*, a musical setting of the Latin Requiem with added psalms and biblical verses with soprano soloist Shannon Kessler Dooley. Other works performed will by "Cantique de Jean Racine" by Gabriel Faure and "Sing Me to Heaven," a choral anthem by Daniel Gawthrop. Admission: $16-20. May 20, 4 p.m. The Wilson Center, 703 North Third St., Wilmington. For information: (910) 362-7999 or wilmingtonchoralsociety.com.

Wilmington Jewish Film Festival

The United Jewish Appeal of Wilmington in association with the Wilmington Jewish Film Festival presents this year's fifth annual festival, "A World of Jewish Film," which showcases nine international features and selected shorts from Israel, France, India and Hungary, among others. All showings will be on the historic Thalian Hall Main Stage, and some screenings are followed by dessert and coffee (the screening on May 6 is followed by dinner). Admission: $7-17. May 1, 5 and 6, various times. See website for complete schedule. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For information: (910) 632-2285 or wilmingtonjewishfilmfestival.org.

Upscale Resale

Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity hosts its fourth annual UpScale ReSale & Design Challenge. Twenty-two local designers will use the resources of the Habitat's ReStore to furnish 10 x 10-foot vignettes, which will be reviewed by celebrity judges. All items are then made available for resale to benefit Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity. Tickets for the VIP Preview Party include hors d'oeuvres, wine and beer. Tickets: $35-40 for May 4 at 6 p.m. (preview party); $5 on May 5, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Art Works, 200 Willard St., Wilmington. For information: (910) 762-4744 or capefearhabitat.org.

Orange You Glad

The Orange Street Arts Fest is Wilmington's largest downtown arts festival, and this year's 23rd annual event includes the work of more than 80 artists from North and South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee. In addition to live entertainment there will be food offerings and a wine and beer tent. Admission: Free. May 26, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.; May 27, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center, 120 South Second St. For information: (910) 251-1788.

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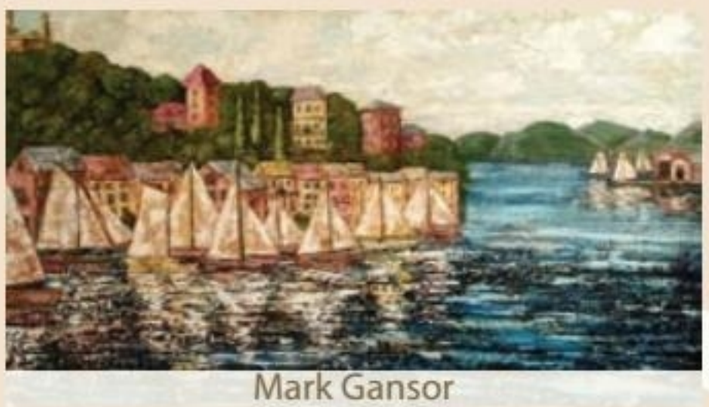
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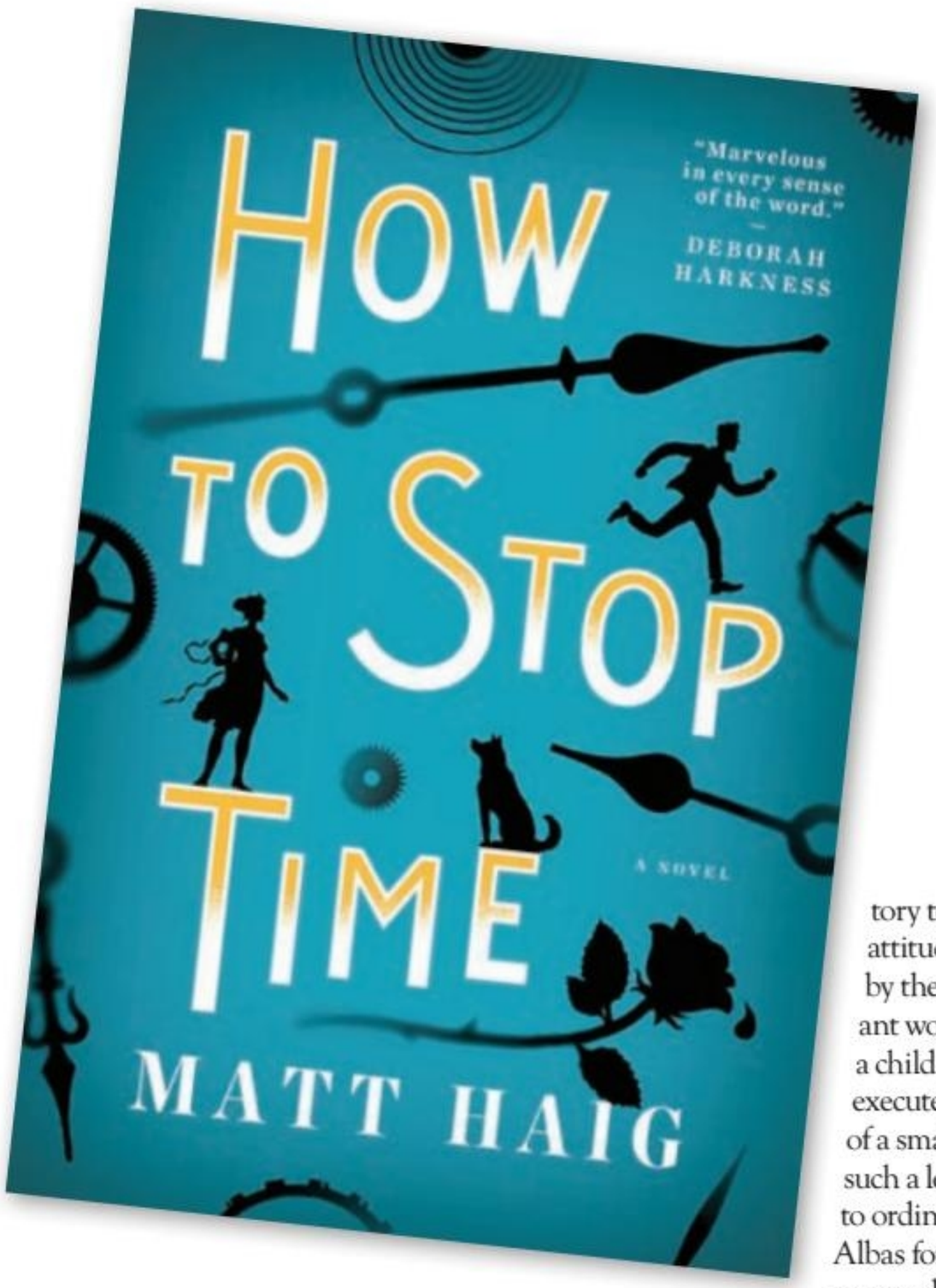

By Stephen E. Smith

My review copy of Matt Haig's *How to Stop Time* fell open to an insert from *Variety* magazine announcing that the "story selection and rights have been acquired by SunnyMarch and Studiocanal" and that the film adaptation of the novel will star Benedict Cumberbatch.

Review copies always arrive with baggage — blurbs, author interviews, questionable testimonials, all of which I ignore. But it's difficult to overlook a printed warning, tucked between the title page and cover, stating that the novel is soon to be a major motion picture. Before I've read the first word, I assume I'm being pitched a puffed-up film treatment, or worse yet, a story intended as fodder for the movie industry. A novel worth reading stands on its own.

Haig is a British author with an impressive track record. He's written umpteen novels for adults and children, and his memoir *Reasons to Stay Alive* was on the best-sellers list for 46 weeks. So his latest offering certainly deserves a critical read, Cumberbatch notwithstanding. But like a film treatment that leaves the heart and soul of the story to be fleshed out by the filmmaker, this yarn about a 400-year-old man who could live to be 1,000 never quite comes together as a rewarding work of fiction.

Tom Hazard, the narrator/protagonist, is living the uneventful life of a history teacher in present-day London, but his attitude toward humankind has been shaded by the trauma of witnessing his mother, a peasant woman accused of being a witch for raising a child (Tom) who hasn't aged appropriately, executed by drowning in the 1600s. Tom is one of a small group of secretive humans who age at such a leisurely pace that they appear immortal to ordinary beings. They're called Albatrosses, Albas for short, because the bird of that name is rumored to live a long life. Regular folks, those of us who usually expire before the age of 100, are called Mayflies. So what we have is a protagonist granted a long, disease-free life and a chance to observe the world with all its faults and favors who instead spends his time ruminating on the disadvantages of an existence that offers almost endless opportunity for pleasure. Which is the novel's primary conceptual fault. Sure, Tom's mother suffered an unfortunate end, and there's the certainty of losing friends and loved ones who aren't blessed with Tom's affliction, and it's likely Albas would be of interest to scientists studying longevity, but the blessings of a long and healthy life far outweigh these impediments. If fate offered us the chance to be an Alba, we'd probably rejoice.

Despite this obvious incongruity, the novel's concept should allow the author to present the reader with complex and unfamiliar perspectives, and Tom's longevity should have blessed him with insights into the mysteries of life that he can share with the reader. But none of this happens, although there is the occasional hackneyed rambling about the past and its relationship to the present: "There are things I have experienced that I will never again be

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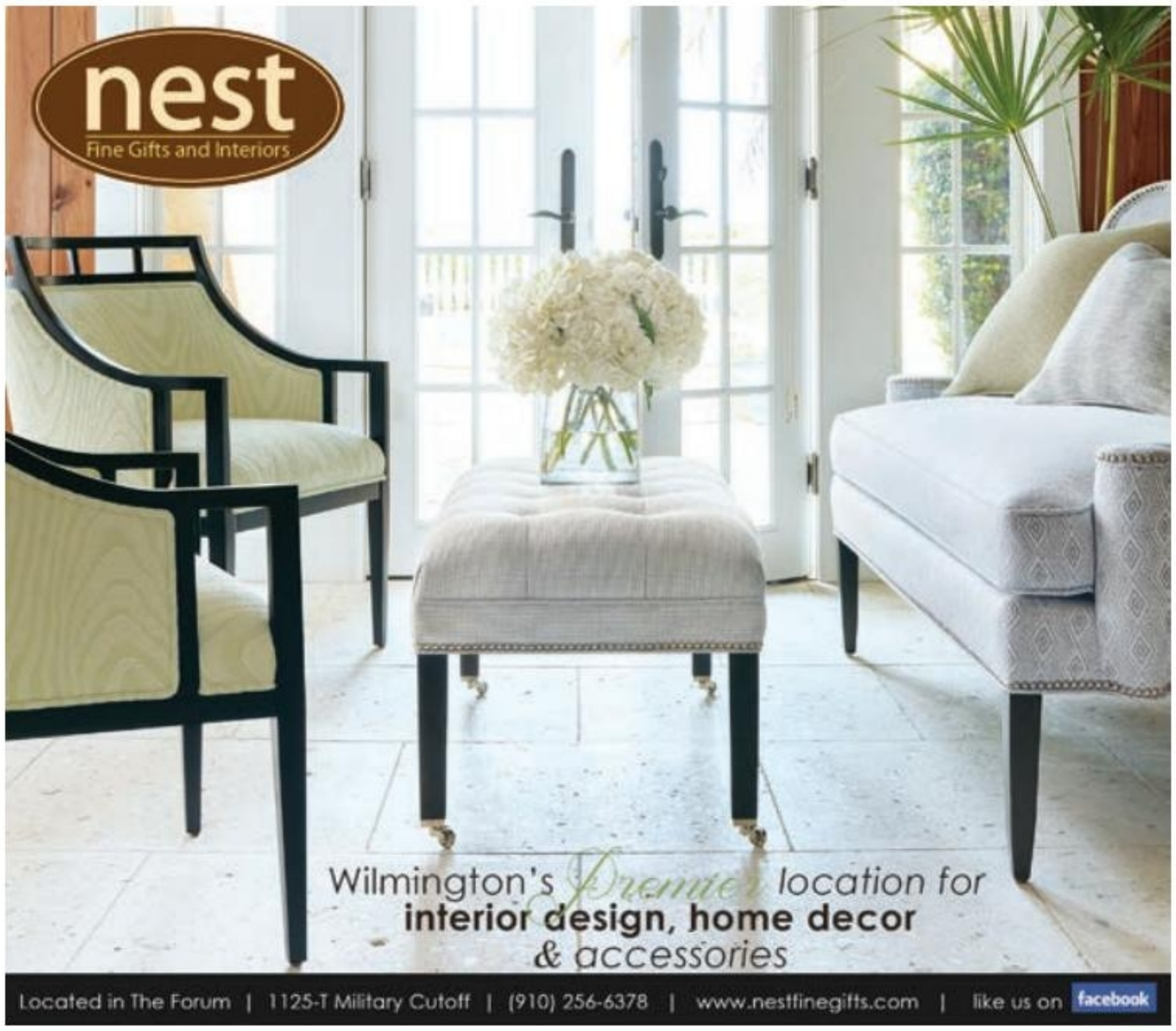
able to experience for the first time: love, a kiss, Tchaikovsky, a Tahitian sunset, jazz, a hot dog, a Bloody Mary. That is the nature of things. History was — is — a one-way street. You have to keep walking forwards. But you don't always need to look ahead. Sometimes you can just look around and be happy right where you are." That's as philosophical as Tom gets.

"The first rule is that you don't fall in love," Tom is told by a fellow Alba, introducing an intended unifying subplot that centers on Tom's emotional attachment to a woman in the present. Thus we have a contemporary love story, albeit a slight one. And there's a manipulative antagonist, Hendrich, the head guy with The Albatross Society, whose purpose is to ensure that Albas remain a mystery to Mayflies. The narrative alternates scenes set in the present with chapters that explicate Tom's backstory. In his former existence, he loved a woman, Rose, who died of plague, and he has a daughter, Marion, also an Alba, who has disappeared and is the object of a half-hearted search that stretches into the novel's melodramatic conclusion. But none of these characters is adequately realized, and they function merely as plot devices or foils.

During his passage through time, Tom meets Shakespeare, Captain Cook, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Josephine Baker and others, but these historical characters appear to no particular purpose and only serve to tease the reader with subplots that never quite materialize. Tom is hired by Shakespeare to play lute at the Globe Theatre and finds himself in a minor dustup that does nothing to advance the plot, and he discusses *The Great Gatsby* and the fleeting nature of happiness with Fitzgerald: "'If only we could find a way to stop time,' said her husband [Scott]. 'That's what we need to work on. You know, for when a moment of happiness floats along. We could swing our net and catch it like a butterfly, and have that moment forever'" — a simplistic reading of Scott and Zelda's story that will strike Fitzgerald aficionados as clichéd.

How to Stop Time has received positive reviews in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Kirkus*, *People* and other media, but potential readers will have to part with hard-earned bucks for the book and, more importantly, they'd have to spend hours reading 330 pages that they'll likely find less than satisfying. They'd be wiser to save their money for a theater ticket and popcorn. With Benedict Cumberbatch in the starring role, the movie might be worth the price of admission — and their valuable time.

Stephen E. Smith is a retired professor and the author of seven books of poetry and prose. He's the recipient of the Poetry Northwest Young Poet's Prize, the Zoe Kincaid Brockman Prize for poetry and four North Carolina Press awards.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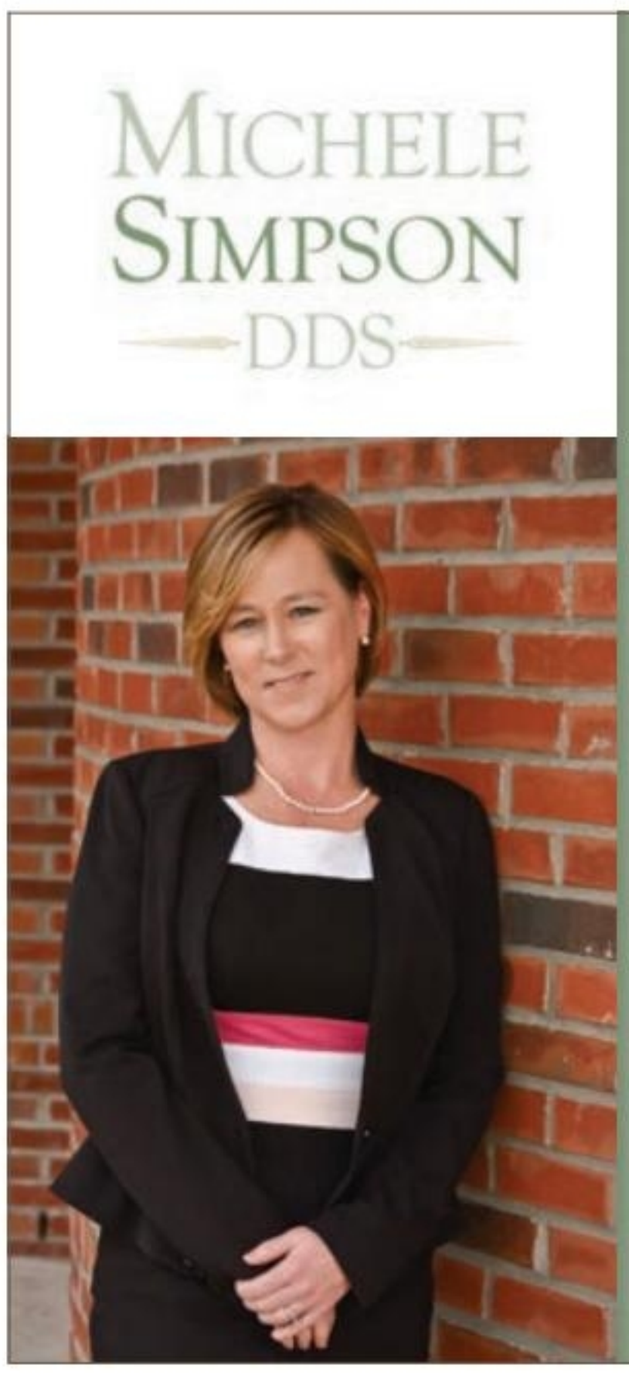

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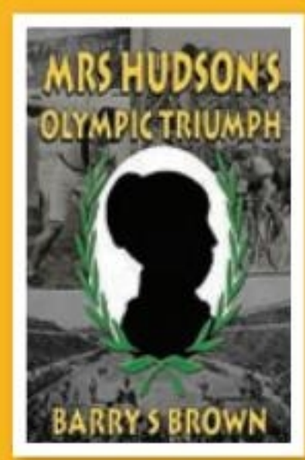

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Presented by: Barry Brown, Author of The Mrs. Hudson of Baker Street Series

Thursday, May 24th, 2018 at 2 P.M.

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Presented by: Stephanie Bias, Program Coordinator, NC Senior Medicare Patrol Program, Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP), NC Department of Insurance

Thursday, May 31st, 2018 at 2 P.M.

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The Voice of Civility

For WHQR's Rachel Lewis Hilburn, civil discourse begins with an open mic – and mind

By Dana Sachs

If you've ever listened to WHQR News – and you probably have, as it's one of the most popular radio news channels in southeastern North Carolina – then you've heard the station's news director, Rachel Lewis Hilburn. Simultaneously soothing and urgent, Rachel's deep, melodious voice telegraphs two essential pieces of information at the exact same moment: *This is important, and don't freak out.*

In other words, it's a voice for our time.

On *CoastLine*, the public affairs show that Rachel hosts on WHQR, she covers a wide range of subjects. She's held programs discussing the complicated issues related to affordable housing. She's brought in educators and activists to debate the issue of neighborhood schools. She has hosted a program on CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, in case you're wondering, and, yes, that's a technical term for hog farms). When Rachel and I meet for lunch at the Harp Irish Restaurant and Pub, she tells me that during every *CoastLine* discussion she tries to guide the conversation without stepping into the middle of it herself. Her goal, she explains, is to become "the frame for the picture," using her questions to create lively, provocative and informative programming. "The mission," she says, "is to help people make educated decisions about things."

In person, Rachel has the same calm, pensive manner that you can hear in her conversations on the radio, but she's quick to laugh, too, especially over her own hesitancy at finding herself, now, on the receiving end of an interview. "I like to recede," she admits, looking at me slyly. Still, today she's game. We've come together to discuss a subject that, Rachel says, "is the one thing that I'm outspoken about."

Rachel wants to talk about talking – "civil discourse," as she calls it. These days, she tells me, our society has become so polarized that many of us have lost the ability to engage in thoughtful conversation. "I feel like somebody needs to be out there and encouraging people to reach beyond their ideological limits," she says.

For Rachel, that means learning to listen to someone with whom you disagree – "really enter the experience of that person," as she puts it. To give me an example, she goes right to the heart of things – the abortion debate – and suggests that people who hold different opinions sit down and try to understand each other's concerns. Abortion opponents, she says, "feel like

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW SHERMAN

there's murder happening in front of them." At the same time, those who support abortion rights believe that laws limiting access "take away the rights of women." Each of these perspectives has a logic and moral basis that Rachel believes deserve respect: "If you're pro-choice, you don't want to inflict suffering. And if you're pro-life, you don't want to inflict suffering."

Listening to an opposing perspective can, of course, produce anxiety. "People worry that they'll lose their identity if they listen deeply," Rachel says. Politicians in particular often refuse to engage in open-minded discussion: "They learn to listen to the other side's buzzwords well enough to ridicule them." Rachel saw this strategy play out during *CoastLine*'s candidate forums before the 2016 elections. Even for local races, guests rarely strayed beyond their canned talking points. "I got pretty frustrated," she tells me. "I just felt like saying, 'This guy's a Republican. This guy's a Democrat. I'm done.'"

Such aggravations provide a good excuse to down a shot of Jameson or a pint of Guinness but, alas, we both have to return to work this afternoon. We take consolation, instead, in fish and chips — crisp, flaky planks of cod served with house-cut fries, cole slaw and the requisite vinegar — and a round of Brie baked inside puff pastry. "It's very rich and buttery," Rachel says of the dish, pointing out that the accompanying crunchy slices of Granny Smith apple offer "a really nice counterweight" to the gooey melted cheese.

It's possible to eat at the Harp without trying the Irish dishes. You could have your fill of wings or chicken tenders, but why would you do that? Order, instead, the Irish Curry Chicken. The dish's creamy sauce, made from scratch in the kitchen, evokes thoughts of Raj-era India with hints of coriander, cumin and clove. Rachel and I make it gluten free by substituting sautéed spinach for rice, and if that's not the way one eats curry in either Dublin or Delhi, doing so makes us feel virtuous enough to order Bailey's Cheesecake for dessert. There's never anything subtle about a cheesecake, especially one that sits atop a crunchy chocolate-chip-speckled graham cracker crust, but it takes a moment before we both detect the signature flavor of Bailey's Irish Cream. "It's that taste I remember from high school!" says Rachel.

When Rachel discusses the need for better communication, she recognizes the enormity of the barriers that remain. Not long ago, she gave a public

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talk advocating for improvements in civil discourse. The audience seemed to be listening attentively, but then one woman stood up and indicated that she, at least, was not. "If I go to a family gathering," she said, "and my sister-in-law says how she feels about a certain candidate, how can I get her to hear me?"

Recounting this story, Rachel sighs, then repeats the question: *"How can I get her to hear me?"* For a moment, Rachel just gazes at me from across the table. Then, she says, "We need to enter not with a need to be heard, but with a need to understand. There's so much magic in seeking to understand."

Getting people to open their minds is not an easy goal to achieve, particularly during these times of heightened tension, and Rachel knows that. She's unwilling to give up, though, and so she looks for reasons to be optimistic when she can. For the *CoastLine* broadcast on CAFOs Rachel brought in, as guests, a representative of the pork industry and a former state legislator responsible for the moratorium on new hog farms. After the program ended and the microphones went off, she noticed that those two kept talking. The industry representative offered to take the environmentalist on an aerial tour to see how much had changed in the years since the moratorium went into effect, and the environmentalist seemed amenable to making the trip. Eventually, the two walked out together, still deep in conversation, and Rachel felt a glimmer of hope. Two people talking with each other doesn't signal seismic change. But, still, she told herself, "It's an opening."

The Harp, at 1423 South Third St., opens every day at 6 a.m. For more information, visit www.harpwilmington.com. Rachel Lewis Hilburn hosts *CoastLine* every Wednesday and Thursday at noon on WHQR radio. For a schedule and links to previous shows, visit www.whqr.org.

Dana Sachs's latest novel, The Secret of the Nightingale Palace, *is available at bookstores, online and throughout Wilmington.*

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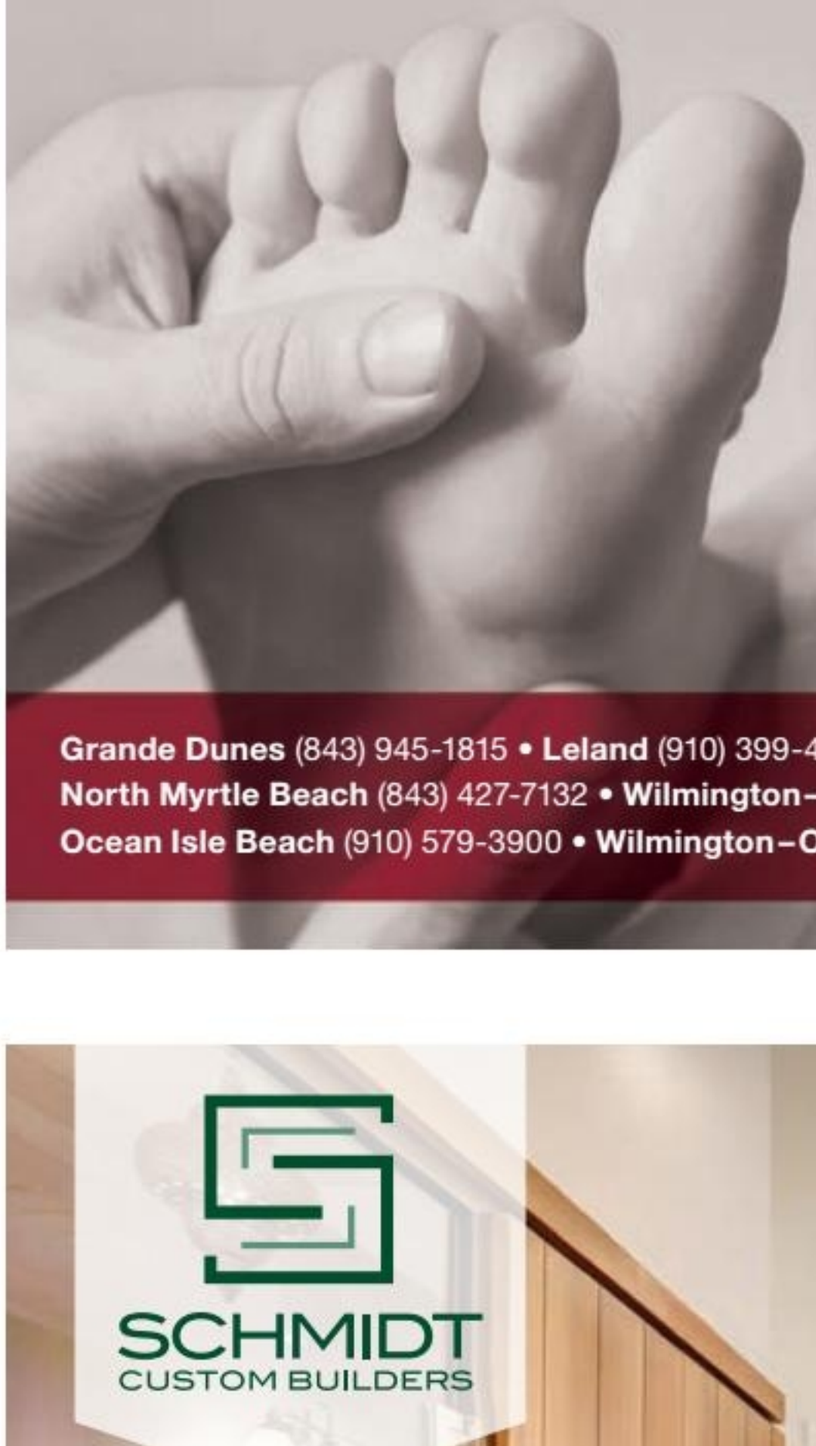

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By Tony Cross

The first time I sipped from a cocktail with elderflower liqueur in it, I think I said something to the tune of, "What the hell is that?" It was every bit as delicious as it was foreign to my taste buds. I was dining at a fantastic restaurant in Chapel Hill (it closed soon after, sadly) about a year before I got behind the bar, where I was bitten by the cocktail bug. That liqueur, St. Germaine, was all the rage at the time. Until recently, I haven't come across anything comparable that's available here. That changed when I received an email from a buddy of mine who reps for a wine company in Raleigh.

A year ago, I received the *exact* same email from my wine rep friend: "The Elderflower Syrup Is Returning," it read. I didn't respond right away or write myself a reminder. By the time I remembered, all of their cases had been sold. Not the case this year — no pun intended. I drove to Durham just to grab a bottle from another restaurant (a big thank you to Patrick over at Guglhupf Bakery, Café & Restaurant). Then I placed an order for 24 bottles of my own. I'll explain why shortly.

Nikolaihof Elder Syrup is a pure, aromatic, non-alcoholic syrup that should be a new staple in your refrigerator. Nikolaihof is located in the Wachau region in Austria. It also happens to be the oldest wine estate in the country, dating back to 470 A.D. The elderflowers grow all over the estate's property, run by the Saahs family. They blossom once a year in late spring. This gives the family only a couple of days to pick them, when they are "perfect." Getting the flowers to this point includes a serious commitment to biodynamic farming. According to their tech sheet, "The Saahs plant and harvest according to the moon calendar and use homeopathic treatments for the grapevines and other plants." After they are plucked, the elderflowers are steeped in a simple syrup, allowing the aromatics and rich flavor to extract into the sugar water. I love the results. Yes, the syrup is sweet, but there are little nuances that give it character. The info sheet I received about the syrup notes that flavors of "lychee, grapefruit, and pear" are present. I get a little pear and lychee, but I also taste a floral funkiness. Don't get it

twisted; this is not a bad thing. The floral funk is slight, and there's just enough of it to say "hello." That's what does it for me.

When trying the syrup for the first time, I recommend adding 1/2 to 3/4 ounce to sparkling water with a squeeze of lemon. That alone is one of the most refreshing drinks I've had in a while, especially in the heat. It's great for someone not imbibing alcohol but wanting to take part in the festivities. If you're graduating to alcohol, add 1/4 ounce to your next glass of dry sparkling wine. Put the syrup in your flute first, then top off with sparkling wine. Take a swath of lemon peel (a grapefruit peel works nicely here too), express oils over the champagne flute, and add the peel.

If you're going to try this in a cocktail, there are myriad spirits and styles awaiting you. Start with sparkling water and add vodka or gin; a blanco tequila or mezcal; or whatever you have in mind or on your shelf. Some of my favorite creations were mistakes or created in one try. Give it a go. The only place you can grab a bottle will be Nature's Own. I got a couple of cases because only 3,500 bottles are produced each year (bottles, not cases).

Below is something I created the day I picked the bottle up in Durham. Actually, it's a remake of a remake. When I finally got around to bartending a year after trying my first elderflower liqueur cocktail in Chapel Hill, I wanted to recreate it at my bar. What I'm sharing is my version of *that* cocktail, but using the Nikolaihof syrup. Different specs, different drink.

The Mysterious Vanishing of Holunderblüten

2 ounces Plymouth Gin
3/4 ounce lemon juice
Scant 1/2 ounce Nikolaihof Holunderblüten syrup
1/4 ounce rosemary-infused simple syrup*

Combine all ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice, and shake until tin is ice cold. Double-strain into a chilled cocktail coupe. Garnish with a lemon wheel.

*Rosemary-infused simple syrup: Add 1/2 cup sugar to 1/2 cup water in a pot and stir over medium heat. Once sugar has dissolved, add three 4-inch stalks of rosemary. Once cooled, transfer to a container. Seal, and refrigerate overnight. Remove rosemary the next day.

Tony Cross is a bartender who runs cocktail catering company Reverie Cocktails *in Southern Pines.*

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Braking for Local Asparagus

Spring is the most ephemeral time of the year, so it pays to cook completely in the moment

By Jane Lear

Asparagus season is in full swing, and a good thing, too, for the vegetable is one of the home cook's greatest allies. It can be steamed, boiled, sautéed, stir-fried, roasted or grilled. It comes elegantly thin or fat and juicy. It's impressive drizzled with vinaigrette, and served as a first course; as a side to chicken, fish, ham, pork, or beef; or worked into pasta primavera, risotto, or an omelet or frittata. It is delicious hot, chilled or room temperature. It swings from simple, even austere, presentations (salt, pepper, olive oil, lemon zest) to more complex ones (in a stir-fry with other spring vegetables, for instance, or tucked into a creamy lasagne) without losing its presence.

And even though it is now found in the supermarket produce aisle pretty much year-round, most of us greet our local crop as something special, eating it with joyous, unabashed greed for the four to six weeks it is available. That is why it's a good idea to buy plenty; I usually allot at least a half pound or more per person. On the off chance there are any leftovers, they're delicious the next morning, warmed through and dipped into a runny soft-boiled egg.

Some people prefer pencil-thin spears, and others like them thick. The difference in circumference is due not to the relative maturity of the spears, but a combination of factors, including the age of the plants from which they were harvested (the thinner the spear, the younger the plant), cultivar and sex. Female plants produce fewer, larger spears; males give a much higher yield of thin to medium spears.

I tend to seek out asparagus that's on the plump side because of its succulent, almost meaty, texture. I also find it easier to deal with. Skinny asparagus may look sophisticated on the plate, but during cooking, it can turn from tender to mushy in about a millisecond, and attention must be paid.

All that aside, go for whatever asparagus, whether thick or thin, is the freshest, because it doesn't keep well. Look for firm, tightly closed tips with a beguiling lavender blush, scales (or leaves, botanically speaking) that lie flat against glossy stalks, and woody ends that are freshly cut and moist. The asparagus in our markets is typically green, but purple cultivars are becoming increasingly available; those are especially nice raw in salads, because when cooked they lose their color, which can range from pale mauve to deep purple. The white asparagus that is more common in Europe is simply prevented from turning green: The growing spears are continually banked with soil to keep them in the dark; that way, they don't produce chlorophyll.

Cooking asparagus is staggeringly simple, and my basic method is as follows. First, rinse the asparagus well to remove any sand or grit (trust me, it's there) and pat dry. Snap off the tough ends (or cut them if the spears are very thick), and peel the stalks if the skin is fibrous.

In a large skillet, lay the asparagus lengthwise, tips facing in the same direction, in an inch or so of salted water. Bring the water to a gentle boil and cook the asparagus until it is barely tender; the tip of a knife inserted in a spear should meet a very slight resistance, and if you pick it up in the middle with tongs, it should bend slightly. Thin spears take just a few minutes and more robust spears a bit longer. Once you've prepared asparagus this way, you can go in any number of directions. Below are two favorites.

A Homey Asparagus Supper for Two

I cobbled together this dish one rainy spring evening a few years ago, and was really proud of myself—until I realized the revered English food writer Nigel Slater had beat me to the punch. "A rubble of cooked, chopped pancetta, and especially its melted fat, makes a gorgeous seasoning for a fat bunch of spears," he wrote in *Tender: A cook and his vegetable patch*. And how.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Using the basic method outlined above, cook a bundle of medium to large asparagus until just barely tender. Meanwhile, melt a generous tablespoon of unsalted butter in an ovenproof skillet or sauté pan over moderately high heat. Add an enjoyable amount of chopped pancetta or bacon and cook until golden. Remove from the heat.

Scrape the pancetta and the fat in the pan to one side and add the asparagus. Spoon the pancetta and fat over the asparagus, then sprinkle with freshly

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grated Parmigiano-Reggiano. Put the pan in the oven and bake until the cheese is melted, 5 minutes or so.

Asparagus Mimosa for Four

This recipe, which can easily be doubled, is a wonderful way to kick-start a dinner party. The asparagus is delicious warm or at room temperature, and the sieved hard-boiled egg is more than a pretty topping: As it absorbs the vinaigrette, it fluffs up like the yellow mimosa blossoms that punctuate winter in Provence. The richness of the egg yolk also gentles the vinaigrette and gives it body.

Cook about 1 1/2 pounds asparagus as above. Cut 2 hard-boiled eggs in half, then press them through a sieve into a small bowl. Whisk together about 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar, 1 tablespoon minced shallot, and a dab of smooth Dijon mustard. (A little minced fresh tarragon would be nice, too.) Add coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Whisk in 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil (use a mild oil, not a peppery Tuscan one). Toss the asparagus in a small amount of the vinaigrette, and reserve the rest. Parcel out the asparagus among four plates, spoon the rest of the vinaigrette over it, and sprinkle with the sieved egg. *Et voilà*!

Asparagus on the Grill

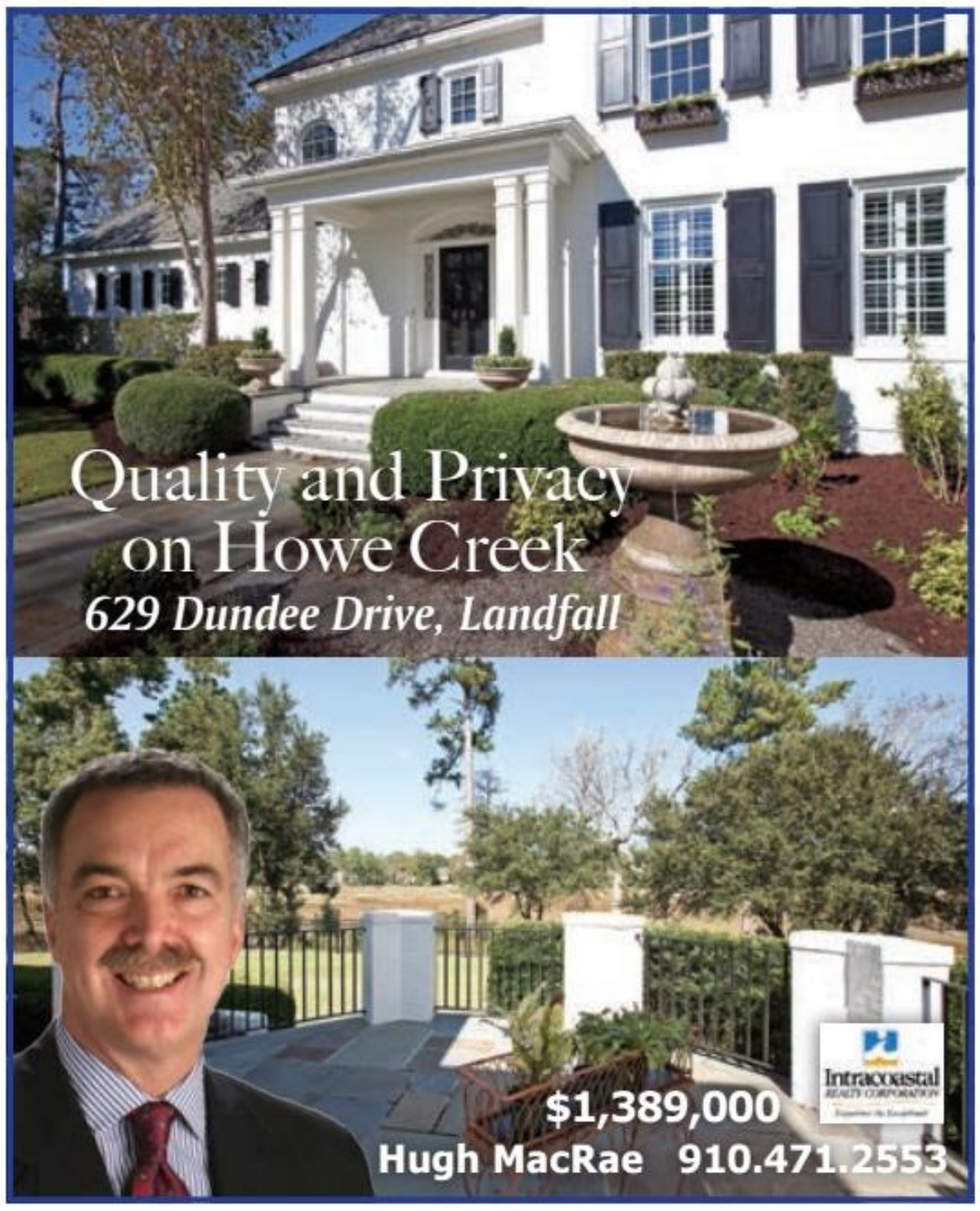
By the time May rolls around, we all want to spend as much time as possible outdoors, not standing over a stove. Luckily for us, the technique of grilling really concentrates the singular sweetness of asparagus and overlays its vegetal purity with a little smokiness. Grilled asparagus is delicious as is or with a garlicky mayonnaise.

"When you put just-picked asparagus on a hot grill, they are so juicy they actually jump as they start to cook," Andrea Reusing once told me. The acclaimed chef-owner of Lantern, in Chapel Hill, and the restaurant at The Durham hotel, in downtown Durham, is extremely deft with seasonal ingredients, and the below recipe is from her book, *Cooking in the Moment*.

Andrea Reusing's Charcoal-Grilled Asparagus

Prepare a hot fire in a charcoal grill. Count on 8 to 10 asparagus per person as a side dish or as the focal point of a salad. Keeping all the tips pointing the same direction, toss the asparagus with olive oil, a generous amount of salt, and some freshly ground black pepper. When the flame has died down, the coals are completely covered with ash, and the grill is very hot, grill the asparagus (in batches if necessary). Cook 2 to 3 minutes per side until fragrant, lightly marked, and vibrant green on the outside, and juicy and tender on the inside.

Jane Lear was the senior articles editor at Gourmet *and features director at* Martha Stewart Living.



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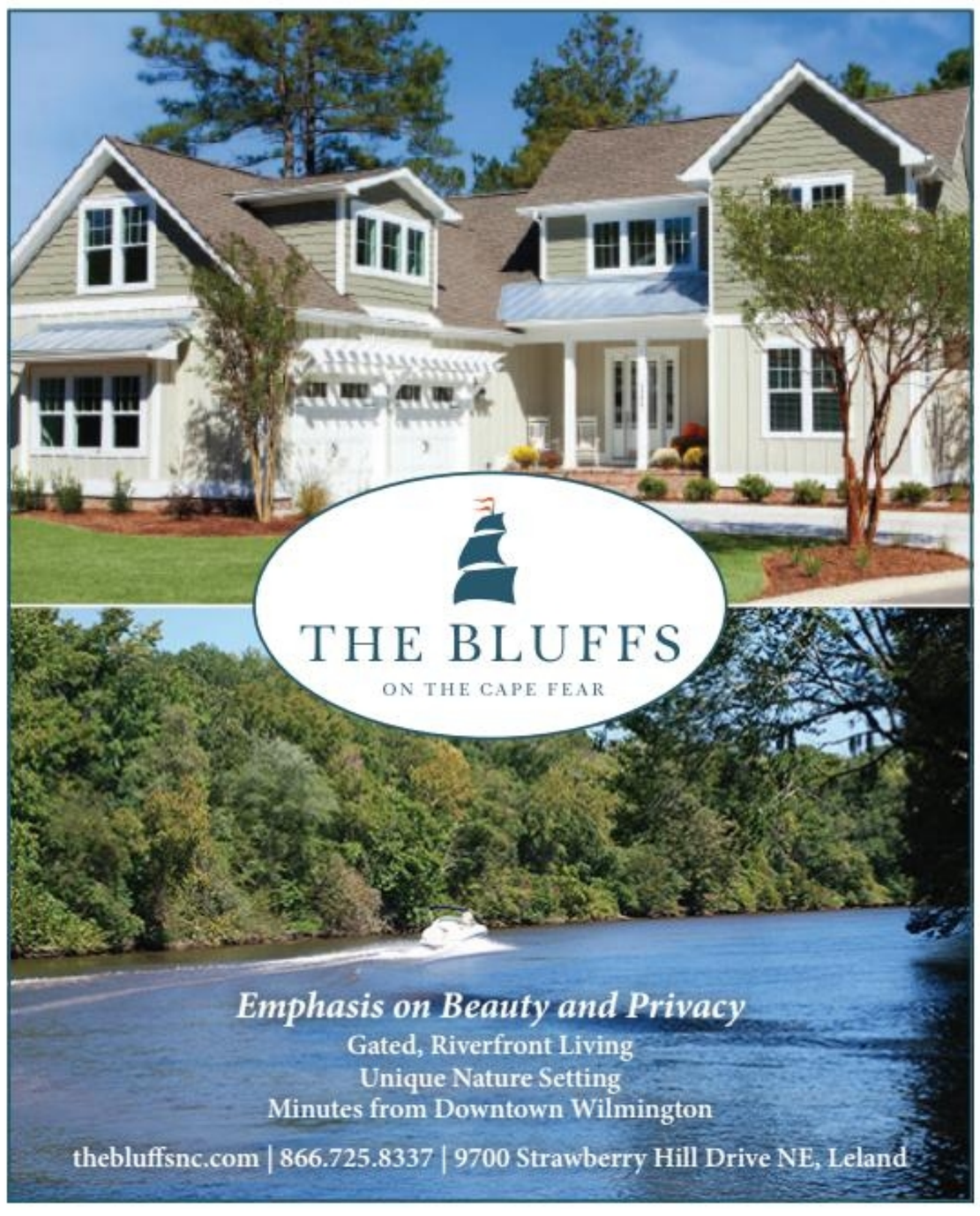
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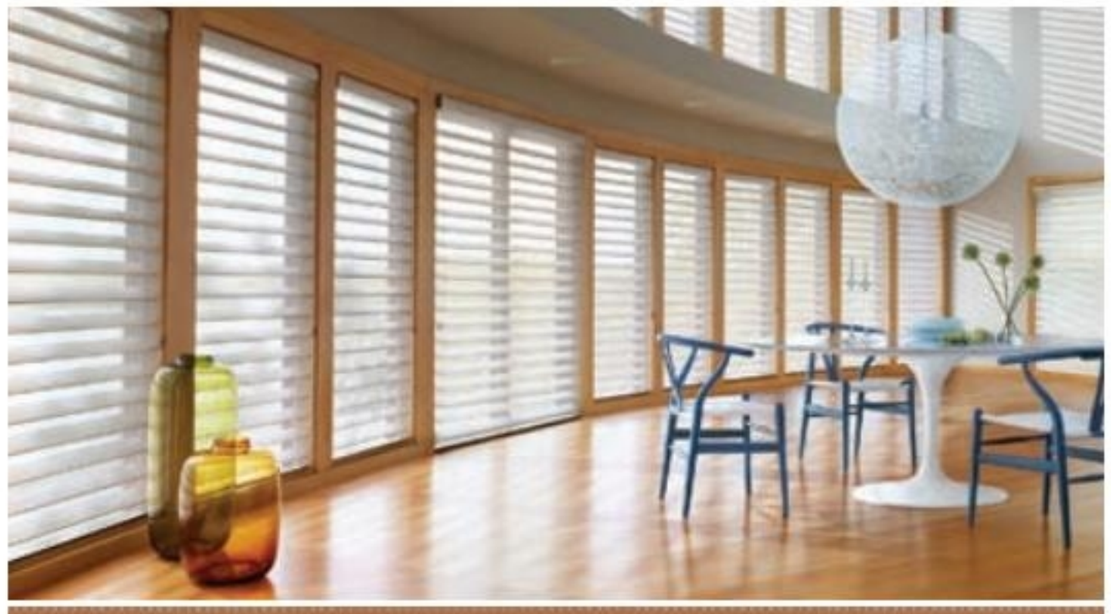

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Mother Load

The art of skinning a cat and other wisdom from Mama's knee

By Nan Graham

Words of wisdom: We learn them at our mother's knee . . . or our father's. And inevitably, we pass them on to our children and their children. What were yours?

My daughter Molly told me the other day that she thought the most important thing I ever taught her was, "There are more ways than one to skin a cat." It was something I heard from Mama in my preschool days. She has found this invaluable when confronting a tough problem and working through her options . . . and no matter what the problem, there are always options. I had no clue this was such a profundity or even memorable. Mama had a way with words. She was what they use to call a "card."

Mama was always cryptic with her adages. "Never send one wild goose after another," she would say when someone was missing in a store or had disappeared in the neighbor's yard. The deal was that you had to stay put. The *missee* would eventually return to the *missor*, was her theory. This seems something of a slippery slope.

I do not rank this high in the "My Mama always told me". . . list. I like Mama's mini-lecture on my spendthrift tendencies: "I don't care if that dollar is burning a hole in your pocket. Save it. You might be poor as Job's turkey some day." I knew that the Biblical long-suffering Job lost his shirt, plus every other stitch he owned, when hard times plagued him. But I never recall a scriptural reference about any of his poultry being penniless. And why would a turkey give a happy damn if his bank account were wiped out?

On sewing, which she seldom did, Mama could give you explicit instructions on how it must be done: "When you hem that skirt, you cannot fold the material under four times like that and hem it," she would say, eyeing the four-inch-deep and half-inch-thick skirt edge that was going to be my hem. "It will never hang evenly. You will look as if you're smuggling rifles." She was right, of course, about it looking ridiculous, but I always wondered that anyone would suspect a teenager of such a nefarious activity crossing some national border.

On shoes: "Forget about not wearing white after Labor Day. Avoid wearing white shoes altogether. They always make your feet look like gunboats no matter what your shoe size." Note the military tone of these admonitions . . . smuggling rifles, gunboat feet . . . remember it was the '50s, so WWII was only a decade or so in the past.

"You should not only avoid evil, but also avoid the appearance of evil." This proclamation was always delivered at breakfast, the morning after I had sat in a car in front of our house TALKING until the wee hours the night before. Flashing porch lights can only be ignored just so long. (I was a Tuscaloosa girl. Only Birmingham girls had the reputation for being "fast.")

But Mama was right. I think of all the politicians who should have this advice tattooed backward on their foreheads so they could ponder the admonition every time they looked in a mirror. Think Clinton, Weiner, Weinstein . . . The scandal rate might have plummeted if this precaution were taken more seriously. Mama's advice could have changed history.

Nan Graham is a regular Salt *contributor and has been a local NPR commentator since 1995.*

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Willet

The largest breeding sandpiper prepares to nest

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEBRA REGULA

By Susan Campbell

It is spring, and a loud "*pill-will-willet*" rings out along the beaches and, even more emphatically, from the sounds along the Carolina coast. Our largest breeding sandpiper, the willet, is once again advertising its territory. Pairs can be seen circling the marshes and beaches, getting ready to nest.

The willet is a tan wader in the winter months that develops handsome barring early in the year. However, the bold black and white wing patches, visible in flight, remain the same. These birds have a long black bill as well as long, dark legs. But in the grassy areas where they nest, their camouflage is superb, and they are only likely to get noticed if they begin to call or are flushed upon approach. Willets in our area will breed in marshy spots or on dredge spoil islands in shallow nests among the low vegetation.

These birds prey on a variety of creatures along the shoreline. Most of their food is taken from the surface of the water, sand or rocks. Willets consume crabs, snails and a variety of insects. They have very sensitive bill tips and so readily probe for shrimp, worms and other invertebrates. As a result, they can not only feed during the day but also at night. Individuals may also be seen chasing or swimming after small fish in the shallows.

As breeding season approaches, willets pair up and begin to search for a suitable nest site. The male will lead the female on their quest and will make small, experimental scrapes for his mate to inspect. When the right spot is located, the pair will dig a mere few inches into the dirt or sand and line the cup with nearby fine grasses. It will take almost a month for the four speckled eggs to hatch. After only a day or two, the downy young will begin following their parents and will already be pecking at the vegetation and sand as potential food items. Females may, like some other shorebird species, feign a broken wing in order to lure would-be predators from their eggs or young.

Willets, by virtue of their size, were once heavily hunted. Their meat was prized, as were their relatively large eggs. Although not a species of concern locally, they are not as common as they once were. Loss of breeding habitat to development as well as higher rates of predation by nutria, opossums and raccoons have taken their toll. Also collisions with low-level power lines are problematic for these birds, particularly juveniles as they are learning to fly.

Willets are one of the few shorebirds that breed in North Carolina. They are not a common sight but are certainly conspicuous where they are found. Pairs may stay together for a number of years and return to the same area each spring to raise a new brood. So should you locate a willet in the coming weeks, consider yourself lucky and keep an eye — and an ear — out for a family group in the area by early summer.

Susan would love to receive your wildlife sightings and photos at susan@ncaves.com.

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The Arborist

The arborist: "This tree is nearly eighty
years old, and bound to fail. Put in when folks
developed Rosemont Street – all up and down
the yards the same – the maples, oaks, and firs.
No wonder she lost this limb." I almost said
I'm seventy-one myself, with lanky limbs
that take me loping 'round the block three times
A week. I hoped he'd say, "Pas possible!"
(His name's duBois!); instead he said, "See?
You know exactly what I mean." Mark laughed.

"So what's the fastest growing tree?" he asked
duBois. "The sycamore. It grows six feet a year,
and when it's done, it's sixty feet, providing shade
like this poor maple." Poor maple. Such girth
I wouldn't call it poor, but Mark had feared
the insides rotted out; duBois concurred.

We paid him then to take old maple down
and plant the slender sycamore. We'll have
to move the chairs elsewhere in the yard,
and get a large umbrella for our shade.
Or else we'll sit all summer under the
porch roof, coaxing the tree to grow. And I'll
be eighty-one when sycamore is done,
or else bequeath it to new owners, just
as when I think of our beloved Hannah –
who's twelve and growing, too – bequeathed by us
to other tenders of emerging things,
those who never knew us – we, the arborists,
who sit where someone sat in nineteen
thirty-eight and watched a little maple grow.

– *Paul Lamar*

On the Black River

Ancient trees and basking in the world of our ancestors

Story and Photographs by John Wolfe

I am bobbing on calm black water beneath a charcoal sky that threatens rain. My kayak is bright orange; there are 29 other boats besides mine in this narrow throat of river, all stroking southeast atop the current, all some unnatural color: deep purples and reds, iridescent greens, blues like the sky will become later in the day, ambers and oranges. A kaleidoscopic flotilla, contrasting with the muted tones of the tangled branches that reach from the banks — visitors from the world of plastic and pavement, here to catch sight of something beyond what we know.

It's no accident that 30 kayaks have descended on this river today. It is the third Saturday in March, and this is the first in a monthly series of paddle excursions coordinated by Cape Fear River Watch. For 10 years these trips have introduced people to, and familiarized them with, the myriad waterways that crisscross our corner of the state. From now until November, anyone can sign up to rent a boat and join the flock of River Watchers. And I do mean anyone — our group is young and old, made up of both experienced paddlers in sleek, narrow craft and kayaking dilettantes whose main focus is not tipping over — but we are all here for the same reason.

Today we are paddling the Black River. The Black is a tributary of the Cape Fear that empties into that mother river roughly 14 miles upstream from Point Peter in Wilmington. Any artist who has studied the color theory of their paints will tell you black is the ultimate color, the color that contains all others; today, we paddlers are the pigments, this river the work of nature's brush which draws us all in. And the Black is aptly named, indeed. As an experiment I dip my white-bladed paddle beneath its rippled surface and find it disappears almost immediately into the inky depths. Just below the surface, the paddle turns the color of heavily steeped tea. This is fitting, considering the tannins that stain this water — leached from the accumulated thousands of shed cypress, pine and oak leaves — are of the same type that color the South's favorite beverage.

The riverbanks are a symphony of gray and green. Cypress trees rise skyward from the sable water, thick and mossy at their bases, tapering to a spindly array of branches from which shoot thin green leaves and the bark-colored orbs that contain their next generations. Their pale knobby knees rise like spirits from the water; silver strands of Spanish moss hang like silent waterfalls. It feels like we have paddled backward through time. Everything is ancient-looking, prehistoric.

This is fitting. Cape Fear riverkeeper Kemp Burdette, who leads the pack in a hunter green canoe, tells me that some of the oldest trees in North America are found in the swampy wetlands of the Black River. Renowned dendrochronologist Dr. David Stahle, in past visits here, took core samples from these cypresses and found a few to be Methuselean in their longevity; a sample from one such tree, nestled deep in the backwaters near a region called the Three Sisters, found it to be 1,760 years old. To give some perspec-

tive: The year that tree was a seedling, England, France and Spain had just broken from the Roman Empire. It would be another 1,266 undisturbed years before the first European explorer would even lay eyes on the Cape Fear River (Giovanni da Verrazzano, an Italian who sailed here in service of the king of France in 1524). Yet another cypress — older still, somehow — was found to predate the birth of Christ by nearly 500 years. Stahle hypothesizes that there might be cypresses in the Black River that are upward of 3,000 years old, which would put them among the oldest living trees on the planet.

Life on the Black exists on more conceivable timelines, too. Kemp tells me he has seen owls and wood ducks, red-bellied woodpeckers and herons, beavers, muskrats and otters, to name only a few species. Already today I have heard more bird calls than my novice ear can identify, and glimpsed the ghostly silhouette of an egret spearing fish along the knotted banks. Tucked-away houses with crooked rambling docks reveal the presence of human life, too, as does a rolling peal of man-made thunder: cannon fire from re-enactors at Moore's Creek, the nearby Revolutionary War battlefield.

One imprint of life which I am thankful that we can't see (or smell) is the presence of pigs. But that doesn't mean it's not here. The headwaters of the Black lie in the undisputed capital of hog country: Sampson and Duplin counties, which contain the highest concentration of concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, in the world. In Duplin County alone there are approximately 30 hogs to every human, or around 2,450 pigs per square mile. Each animal produces an average of 14 pounds of feces, adding up to about 15,000 tons total, every day — twice as much waste as what the human population of New York City produces. One major difference between the Big Apple and Duplin County (besides the lighter traffic and a complete lack of off-Broadway theater) is how this waste gets treated, or rather, how it doesn't. The, ahem, excrement is left to fester in open, unlined lagoons, or is piped out to local fields, where it is sprayed in a fine mist as fertilizer. When rain comes, the excess waste runs into drainage ditches, which in turn empty into creeks and streams, which themselves flow into — you guessed it — local rivers, including the Black.

This is a problem for many reasons. In addition to carrying all the bacteria you might associate with untreated sewage (E. coli being chief among them), the runoff also carries high amounts of nutrients like nitrogen. Excessive nitrogen in a waterway can cause harmful blooms of blue-green algae and fish kills from eutrophication (this is when the dissolved oxygen in the water is consumed by microorganisms, leaving very little for larger life forms like fish). What's bad for the rivers isn't all that great for the farmers, either. Most of them are subcontractors to the Smithfield corporation, which was recently purchased by the Chinese firm the WH Group. The nature of the contracts these farmers sign is such that the corporation owns the feed, the animal and all the profits; this leaves the farmer with ownership of, and liability for, the land — and, perhaps more importantly, the waste.

"Nice to get out of the city limits every once in a while," comments the guy paddling beside me, interrupting my mired thoughts. He's absolutely right. It is nice to escape from the complexities of life in the city, even if only for a morning, and even if not entirely. It's necessary from time to time to return to the comparative simplicity of nature, to focus on the interplay between boat and paddle and river, between tree and self and sky.

That's part of the reason we are all paddling here today, getting to know the Black River on a first-name basis. By learning the rivers that trace through the backyards of our cities, we are re-establishing a link between us that has always existed, whether we've been aware of it or not. Humans, just like ospreys and fish and cypress trees and otters, need clean waterways; the water in this river will eventually flow into an intake pipe at the public utility and will pour out of my faucet and into my drinking glass. It's not an exaggeration to say that some of the stuff I'm paddling through now will eventually flow through my very veins. Our health is dependent on the health of our rivers.

Out here, we can bathe in the world as our ancestors did, reconnecting with a reality which, like the cypress tree, is more ancient than ourselves. To paddle here is to reach beyond the nearsightedness of civilization, to recognize how we fit in to a larger puzzle, to understand how our own actions affect our planet. That empires have risen and fallen in the lifetime of a single tree gives us some slight clue to the sublime scale of the world we live in — and to the sweet uncertainty of our own existence. This gift of deep perspective, as well as the gift of water which is life itself, is what rivers like the Black give to us.

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The Power of a Porch

My husband and I linger for hours on ours. But it's been a lengthy journey to get here

By Virginia Holman

I didn't realize until I was an adult that I'd missed out on the quintessential Southern experience of porch sitting. I'd spent some time on the porches of others, shelling butterbeans or detasseling corn after church for Sunday dinner, which was pleasant enough, but it wasn't a defining experience because I'd never had a front porch of my own. Growing up I'd lived in homes that had stoops of one kind or another, but no one sat on them. In the country, I'd lived in a rural coastal cottage in the piney woods with a slab entry the size of a sidewalk square, barely wide enough to fit a folding chair. When we moved to the suburbs, we upgraded to a home with steps that led to a cement stoop, as did most of our neighbors, but no one ever sat on them on warm days to chat with passersby — the homes were too far apart — and most people drove past anyway, windows up, air conditioners humming.

My first true experience of the charms of the Southern front porch was in the late '80s at the home of Greensboro's late Jim "Lester" Clark, a wild-haired, gentle-spoken man who directed the graduate creative writing program at UNCG. To say that Jim administered the program doesn't get at the scope of his assumed task. He cared deeply for the graduate students. He helped us find apartments, held our hands when we wept over a family tragedy or a bruising writing workshop review. Jim didn't broadcast it, but he was a man of the cloth, so he was persuaded by a few of us to officiate at a wedding, a task he resisted mightily, because he knew we were all quite young, the odds were long, and like a good father, he just wanted the best for us. Mostly, Jim was a community organizer at heart, and he and his wife, Danielle, allowed us to fill their porch a couple of times a week. He always had a good crowd at the end of the month when our student pantries dwindled to scavenged leftover crackers and cheese from university functions, five-for-a-dollar packages of ramen, rice and margarine, and fed us real food on a salary that wasn't substantially more than our graduate stipends when you considered he was supporting a family on it. His neighbors tolerated us with mostly good cheer, waving to us from their porches to his as we laughed, peeled shrimp, ate plate after plate of red beans and rice, and sweated through another Southern evening with frosty canned beer.

I didn't spend much time inside Jim's home except when I had a dish to warm in the kitchen or to use the powder room. I once dared to pull back the curtain of his empty but still wet shower, and saw his half-full mug of coffee in the soap dish, and immediately felt ashamed. I'd trespassed as sure as if I'd broken the lock on his daughter's diary. The interior spaces of the house were too personal. The porch, with its hanging baskets of ferns filled with nesting finches, was where we students belonged and thrived. After all, as graduate students we were all just passing through, and the transitional space of the porch was the perfect setting for us for a few years before we moved on, our rocking chairs filled by the next rotation of students with heads full of stories they hoped to write well enough to set the world on fire.

Later, I deepened my porch practice when my father retired to a historic city home in Richmond, Virginia. As the sun set over the James River, we'd sit on the front porch in the evenings and shoot the breeze with the neighbors as they walked past. To someone who is socially shy and reserved to the point of silence with those I don't know well, porch life was a revelation. It was the perfect way to socialize in an easy way. Who knew conversations could be dropped into and out of with such ease? Unlike a more formal gathering held in someone's home, you weren't obliged to engage in mind-numbing chitchat meant to place you in the social taxonomy. "What do you do? Do I know your mother; what's her maiden name? Where did you say you went to school?" When you were porch chatting you could sit a spell or not; there was no pressure, no expectation, and the knot in my chest I felt in most social situations as a young woman loosed and relaxed. Somehow, interactions that took place around a porch were easy.

In the early 1990s, my husband and I moved to Durham and lived in what the Realtors codedly called a "transitional" neighborhood. All we knew was that it was reasonably safe, almost affordable and an easy half-mile stroll to two world-class bookstores. The area was unlike anywhere I'd ever lived. We were mostly a street of renters, but a few folks bought homes for a song and fixed them up. These were old mill houses lined up close together, and our street was a couple of blocks from a car wash, and one street over from the fire station and a new restaurant in an old grocery store that served meals that cost half our rent.

Our little block was originally settled by old-timers who had worked the mills. A couple of them still lived there. Our neighbors Betty and Stuart spent their working lives there. Stuart looked the same as he had in the 1950s, except his flattop was now gray. He'd lost most of his arm in the mill and spent his days on the front porch in a black leather bomber jacket, watching the days pass. They lived next door to our friends David and Royce, life partners who were raising three kids. David was raising his daughter with a lesbian couple, Barb and Mab, who lived a couple of neighborhoods over, and Royce had two children from a previous marriage to a woman. On the other side of them lived a young, very preppy, politically active and childless Republican couple, and across the street a devout Catholic family from Kentucky with three kids. Up the road, another lesbian couple was raising three delightful kids. Several of the larger homes held a collection of Duke graduate students who lived so many to a house that it was impossible to discern anyone's political or sexual orientation without inquiring directly, and why would someone do that anyway? When a new person would move to our street, they'd comment at some point on "how eclectic" the neighborhood was. True, folks lived their lives in different ways, but any sense of otherness quickly vanished after a few porch sessions. After those, we were all "just neighbors," drifting with ease in and out of one another's lives via our porches, where we hosted potlucks, greeted a new baby and shot the breeze.

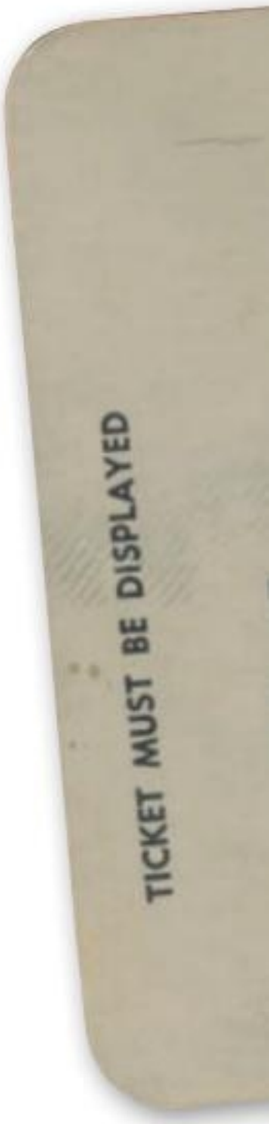
Again, I marveled at the ease of these exchanges. At that time, it was hard to imagine our delightful motley gang of neighbors with such different ways of being in the world seated together comfortably in a formal dining room, but when we gathered together on a wide front porch on a soft spring evening, it felt natural. On the porch, that transitional space in our transitional neighborhood, our differences mattered little. Over time, we became a community, looking out for one another, babysitting, bringing a casserole when someone passed away, offering tomatoes and cucumbers from the back garden.

A few years later, my husband and I upgraded to a beautiful historic bungalow with a wide front porch. The community was "well established," the neighbors were mostly quite pleasant, though a bit less diverse, but the hedges and the price point were both higher, and we never visited with our new neighbors in quite the same way we had in our transitional community.

I know people who say they've lived in neighborhoods that seem designed for estrangement. A garage door opens, cars drive in or out, and the metal door closes. Neighbors are walled off from one another even though 25 feet away, someone sleeps, eats, laughs, and cries, and rarely says more than hello. These houses never seem to have porches.

We now live in a house up on stilts with two long, narrow front porches. My husband and I linger on them for hours, napping in a hammock, reading in the porch swings. We listen to the neighbor kids play basketball and eavesdrop when neighbors chat about a day on the water while they clean their catch downwind. Sometimes, I'll lean my head back, close my eyes and hear the hummingbirds chirp and zoom as they chase one another away from the feeder. Here at the coast, I think the best days are the ones right after a storm, when the sun emerges, and the neighbors come outside and chat from porch to porch to marvel at a rainbow stretched across the sky.

Author Virginia Holman lives and writes in Carolina Beach.



The Four Masters

An enduring springtime ritual shared by a quartet of golf-loving friends from Charlotte to the Cape Fear

By Jim Dodson

"Without question," says Greensboro's Keith Bowman with a gentle smile. "It's been quite a journey."

"Seems like just yesterday," agrees Charlie Gordon of Charlotte. "Has it really been that long?"

"It was just a minute ago when we first went," adds Wilmington's Ted Funderburk on a wistful note.

"Fortunately we have some great memories," Charlie points out.

"And it's not over yet," says Bowman.

Heads bob in agreement.

And with that, the stories begin to fly like an Arnie Palmer golf ball.

These three gents — all comfortably ensconced in their early-to-mid 80s, sit around a glass table leafing through a pair of remarkable scrapbooks meticulously assembled over more than half a century by Keith Bowman.

Like a trio of modern-day Musketeers, they are master swordsmen of a different sort who've enjoyed quite an adventure in each other's company. And just like legendary companions of Alexandre Dumas's famous novel — Athos, Aramis and Porthos — there is even a devoted fourth member of their select fellowship. Jimmie Eckard is the d'Artagnan of the group, but on this day he is at is at home in Parksley, Virginia, taking care of his ailing wife, though happy to contribute by phone.

Military service shaped all of their lives, but the swordsmen in question are in fact a quartet of golf-loving white dudes bonded till death do them part by a powerfully shared affection for each other and an annual rite of American springtime called the Masters Golf Tournament. For 58 consecutive years, they've faithfully attended professional golf's most celebrated and coveted boutique event, collecting a lifetime of colorful memories and intimate brushes with the biggest stars in the game from Arnie to Tiger.

"Not bad," quips Keith Bowman, "for fellas who aren't millionaires — just four friends from college."

Maybe so, but as the years of their love affair and Bowman's magical scrapbooks reveal, their memories are, indeed, priceless.

Charlie and Jimmie grew up in Charlotte. Charlie's dad ran a meat market and worked for the Greyhound Corporation. Jimmie's daddy lost an arm working for Merita Breads and later ran the company's factory shop that sold day-old bread.

Ted was something of a high school sports legend out in Matthews long before it got swallowed up by suburban Charlotte.

"We heard stories about Ted even before we met him," says Charlie

with a laugh. "A real athlete. He played everything — baseball, football, basketball. In college he even became a tennis champion."

Keith grew up on Bellevue Street in South Greensboro. His daddy was a fine carpenter. Around age 12, Keith and a buddy got interested in golf and built a 3-hole golf course in a field near his house. They also fashioned crude golf clubs from broom handles and wood scraps from Keith's father's woodshop.

"My buddy and I were fully in charge of construction and maintenance. All other kids in the neighborhood soon wanted to play it." Not long after this, through a neighbor who ran the caddie program at Greensboro Country Club, Keith found a job caddying, riding his bicycle through town to the north side of the city on weekends and holidays. "I think I got 75 cents for 18 holes and once caddied for one of the Cones, either Herman or Ceasar, I forget which," he remembers with a grin. "In lieu of a tip, Mr. Cone equipped his bag with a sheepskin strap that made carrying it easier — or so he thought. But that's when I really fell for golf."

Bowman soon acquired a real set of clubs and began playing at the public Gillespie Park and eventually carried his love of golf off to college — first to Duke University and then on to "State College" — which is how most people referred to N.C. State University back then. He planned to study architecture and structural engineering.

Charlie and Jimmie, who became good friends their final year in high school, also went off to study engineering at State.

Ditto Ted Funderburk, hoping to also be an engineer of some sort.

The four wound up in the same freshman dorm, Tucker Hall, and attended several of the same classes. They were also in ROTC together and later became roommates on and off campus, developing a friendship that bloomed like dandelions on a spring lawn.

Golf soon sealed the deal.

"I needed to take a phys ed course and found that golf was available, so I took that," Charlie says, "and got hooked."

"They had a driving range with wooden clubs at State," recalls Ted, who also played his way onto the school tennis team. "That's where I learned to hit a driver and thought, wow, this is great." Pretty soon, he and his college chums Keith, Charlie and Jimmie were beating the ball around local municipal courses and the Raleigh Country Club, where State students were allowed to play. Back home in Charlotte they played at a course owned by local PGA star Clayton Heafner.

"Ted got good fast," reports Jimmie from Parksley.

"He was a scratch player eventually," notes Keith.

"No, no," rumbles Ted good-naturedly. "The best I ever reached was three or four."

"Better than any of us," cracks Charlie.

"Well," Keith picks up the story, "the point is, we all liked each other a lot and we loved to play golf and that eventually led us to plan to try and attend the Masters."

It was 1960 before they pulled off the feat.

By then Keith had done his required stint in the Air Force and Jimmie was still in the Army, serving in Vietnam, in fact, in the early days of a distinguished 20-year Army career that would lead him to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In his 50s he retired home to Charlotte and purchased a 19-acre orchard, and began growing apples and peaches.

By 1960 Charlie had graduated as a civil engineer, also done his required military service and was working as North Carolina's lead Construction Officer. In time, he would rise to the post of Director of the state's construction projects, and later become a key administrator for the Small Business Association.

Following his stint in the Army, Ted was working in Charlotte as a division engineer in the state highway department, playing a lot of golf around the Queen City. He got a promotion to Raleigh and eventually transferred to Wilmington, which suited his career and golf game just fine. In more ways than one, Eastern North Carolina became his turf.

Keith, in 1960, was working as a design engineer for Western Electric on a secret Nike missile project in Burlington. On weekends he and his buddies from work would "scurry down to Pinehurst to play No. 2. You could play all day and the price even included a shower in the locker room." More than once,

Ted drove over from Charlotte to join him.

"We were both really crazy for golf," Keith underscores, having once captured a third-flight Carolina Golf Association tournament at Pinehurst. His handicap in those days, he reckons, was about a 16 or 18.

The college chums still shared a dream of attending the Masters Tournament someday in each other's company.

Their timing couldn't have been more historic. The year 1960 was a seminal moment in the growth of American golf, largely owing to the telegenic charm and go-for-broke style of a charismatic player from working class Latrobe, Pennsylvania, named Arnold Daniel Palmer.

"I loved Arnold Palmer and decided I had to see him in action at the Masters. I invited Ted to join me." Keith remembers. "That's when it all started for us."

"Keith picked me up in Charlotte and we drove down on a Friday night. It was rainy and we didn't know where we would stay. But we were young and it was a great adventure."

At that moment the Masters was a reasonably priced affair, attended by maybe 15,000 fans on any given Masters Sunday. A daily ticket — which was still available — went for $3.50, the equivalent of $30 adjusted for inflation. Today, 60 years later, a full tournament pass that includes practice rounds and the famed par-three tournament on Wednesday goes for just under $400, if you can lay hands on one. Famously, Masters tickets are believed to be the toughest tickets in all of sports to acquire.

Keith and Ted paid $15 for the entire week but only needed them for Saturday and Sunday, a bargain considering that tickets for Saturday and Sunday, the days they mostly went, were $7.50 per day. Through the local chamber of commerce, they managed to rent a room at an Augusta boarding house and went out to the local Holiday Inn Lounge where they discovered the Hebert brothers, Jay and Lionel, the trumpet-playing Cajuns who managed to both win the PGA Championship during the day, while performing in the motel lounge at night.

"That was pretty exciting," recalls Keith, "but we were dead tired from the drive. The next morning we woke up and realized what an awful place we'd spent the night in. It looked like it rented by the hour."

So before heading off to the course, they arranged new digs just two blocks off Washington Road and the entrance to Augusta National. It was the home of Kitty and Quentin Moore. With only a handful of hotels and motels in the city, Augusta residents often rented out their houses and rooms to Masters patrons, as they were called. These days, local residences during Masters week routinely rent for five and six figures, many of them rented by corporations for entertaining clients.

In 1960, however, the thoughtful Moores actually moved out to a trailer in their backyard and allowed Ted and Keith to have the run of the place.

"The Moores were wonderful people and we hit it off immediately," says Ted. So much so, the twosome — soon to be expanded to a golf foursome — wound up staying with the Moores for the next 37 years.

"That was the beginning of a great friendship. When they moved to a new neighborhood, we moved with them," says Keith. "We watched them have kids and watched the Moore kids grow up. We grew old with the Moores year after year and even attended both of their funerals a few years back."

History records how Arnold Palmer won his second Masters in 1960 — and went on to have the kind of year, dreams are made of capturing the US Open in extraordinary fashion later that summer in Denver and almost taking home the Claret Jug from the British Open Championship. His unprecedented popularity would begin to rewrite American golf, producing historic growth of the game.

What it doesn't record is the joy Keith Bowman felt upon seeing his golf hero in the flesh and at his peak.

"He just captivated the galleries. There was so much excitement in the air. In those days, they let patrons bring in cameras for taking photographs after the day's play," he says, noting how he always wiggled his way to the front of the crowd for the presentation of the champion's green jacket, and used his trusty Nikon camera to snap some beauties of Arnold and Winnie sharing a triumphant moment.

Maybe even more impressively, Bowman managed to shoot every Masters green jacket ceremony up to Tiger Woods, and hundreds, if not thousands, of casual shots before and after their tournament rounds. Most of the champions Keith photographed were happy to autograph their photos for his scrapbook, including a reluctant superstar named Ben Hogan. Over the years, Keith also sent his photos to a gallery of the game's biggest stars, most of whom wrote back thanking him with personal letters.

"I took my first photo of Mr. Hogan warming up on the practice range in on April 7, 1962. Two years later, I approached him before the third round — where he shot the low round of 67 — and asked if he would mind autographing my photo of him. He said to me, 'I've got work to do but come find me after the round, I'll be happy to sign it.' Keith did just that and Hogan not only autographed the photo but introduced him to his wife, Valerie. "We had a very nice conversation. What a classy man. It was such a thrill."

Keith's weren't the only set of eyes on the Wee Ice Man, as the admiring Scots nicknamed the reclusive Fort Worth star on his way to winning the Claret Jug at Carnoustie in 1953.

"I loved watching Hogan warm up — learned a lot by just watching him," says Ted Funderburk. "I read his books *Power Golf* and *Five Lessons* and really improved my golf as a result of seeing Ben Hogan."

In the 1962, a large black-and-white snapshot of the massive crowds sitting on the hill by the 16th hole appeared in *Life* magazine. There among the faithful hordes in their Easter finery sit none other than young Ted Funderburk and Keith Bowman looking on as Arnold Palmer headed for his third Masters title, tying him with Sam Snead and Jimmy Demaret.

By 1972, Charlie Gordon and Jimmie Eckard had joined the annual spring road trip, completing the foursome for all four days. On one of Charlie's first trips to Augusta, as an Army Reservist, he had to brief a general before racing to the airport to catch a flight to Augusta, changing out of his uniform as wife Barbara raced him to the airport.

"I just made the flight and got off the plane to find a group of absolute strangers welcoming me. Keith and Ted had whipped up a little crowd just to greet me — and Kitty Moore even baked a cake for the occasion. That was the kind of fun we had."

The first three years Jimmie attended the tournament in his uniform. "You could get a ticket half price. There was such respect for soldiers there. Everyone was treated that way at the tournament. Once you're inside the gates, everyone is the same."

The group typically started their tournament treks at the first green then fanned out across the course, often peeling off to follow their own favorites.

Keith stayed true to Arnie, as did Jimmie, who learned to follow Winnie Palmer, who knew the best places to stand near her man. (One story the group loves to hear again and again, told by Jimmie, is how Winnie, to stave off hunger, had stashed a piece of fried chicken in her purse. At the very moment she was discreetly removing it, she was approached by a fan. The ever-gracious Winnie politely offered her lunch to the woman, who gladly accepted it, leaving Winnie hungry.) A crack gardener who kept a large farm in Climax where he propagated azaleas, Keith snipped off pieces of a golden flowering Augusta azalea from the woods around second and eighth fairways. He took them home, soaked in water, and for years tried to get them to take root — until he was finally successful.

Jimmie Eckard also had a thing for Chi Chi Rodriguez and Lee Trevino. Charlie liked following Trevino and Gary Player.

"Trevino was such a people's favorite," Charlie says, launching into a memory of how he was once standing by an errant Trevino shot when the Merry Mex strode up and glared at his poor lie, removed a club and he glanced at Charlie. "Here, you better hit this shot for me." The gallery roared. "Trevino played fast. I remember how he hit his shot and remarked to his slower playing partners, 'C'mon, folks. Hit your shots. I've got to get across the river and feed the cows.'"

Ted fancied the buttermilk swing of Julius Boros and had a sweet and unexpected encounter with the two-time US Open champ one evening after play's end. "It was near dusk. We always liked to stick around so Keith could take pictures, and Boros was relaxing at the back of the clubhouse with a drink. We started chatting — I knew he had connections to Mid Pines and Pine Needles, one of my regular golf places — and he wondered if I wanted a drink, too. He gave me his clubhouse pass and I went in and got my own toddy. We had nice long conversation."

Ted was the group's only drinker.

"We weren't much into the party aspect of the Masters," notes Keith. "Pretty calm bunch just into the golf."

"In other words," jokes Charlie, "dull as could be."

How about Jimmie?

"Dullest of all," says Ted (who gave up drinking years ago). "But don't tell him we said that."

One year, however, the group came across an elaborate wedding party staged in the parking lot after the tournament. Because of their long-standing friendships with the tournament's ground staff and parking attendants, the Four Masters always managed a primo parking spot near the entrance gate.

"The wedding couple was from Texas. They had a Cadillac rigged with a set of longhorns, lots of food, flowers, champagne, even a chandelier," Keith recounts. "They invited us to join them. We had a great time."

In 1976, eager to have his own tickets, Jimmy Eckard placed his name on the famous Master ticket waiting list and had to wait until 1992 to get a couple of coveted passes so he could take his wife to her first Masters. While watching *The Price Is Right* TV show one evening, he was bothered when one of the big prizes was four weeklong passes to the Masters. "I couldn't believe it so I wrote to Augusta to tell them how disappointed I was that fans had to wait for years to get their tickets — but here they were handing out tickets on a game show to people who might not care about anything about golf."

He received a nice thank-you letter from the tournament office. The ticket giveaways ceased.

Over the decades, the four became so friendly with security and tournament workers, they also wound up photographed in Keith's memory books — a friendship that came in handy more than once.

One year during the green jacket ceremony, a *Sports Illustrated* photographer complained to Keith for not having an official media credential and promptly reported him to security. "I'll have to ask you to come with me," the Pinkerton guard told him. "I'm just doing my job." The guard then escorted him to "an even better spot to take my pictures."

Over the past six decades, there is little the Four Masters from North Carolina haven't seen or experienced at the world's premier golf tournament, including weather — biting cold and rain, blistering heat waves, perfect spring evenings (often in the same weekend), not to mention aching feet, free discarded chairs, chance encounters with celebrities and more memories than one can possibly document in a pair of large scrapbooks.

"We go because we love golf and, frankly, never see each other the way we once did," muses Ted Funderburk, who still plays a mean game around the Cape Fear.

"We go because we've been friends since college and this is our shared ritual," adds Keith Bowman. "Also, it's the Masters, the greatest golf tournament on Earth. It's always the same but always different, some new every year. Things stay with you."

Charlie still thinks about Arnie Palmer's final round at Augusta, for example. This was in 2004, Arnie's 50th trip to his favorite tournament. "It was late Friday afternoon. He'd missed the cut for the final time. I happened to be standing in front of the clubhouse when he came out and climbed into his Cadillac. The crowd saw him and began cheering. He rolled the window down and smiled. You could see the emotion on his face, how he loved that place and his fans. We watched him drive away, down Magnolia Lane for the last time as a player. I'll never forget that."

This year, 2018, their 59th odyssey to Augusta, was be slightly different. Jimmie's legs could no longer manage Augusta National's fabled hills. But a Greensboro special education teacher named Rick Haase made his second trip with the group.

Keith notes that the fellas are hoping to make it an even 60 years before their annual spring pilgrimage to Augusta ceases.

"We walk a little slower," adds Ted Funderburk, the group's lone single handicapper, who still plays regularly around the Cape Fear region. "But the magic is still there. It's all about history and friendship and the return of golf in the spring." **OH**

Jim Dodson is the editor of Salt, *and the author of too many golf books to count.*

PHOTOGRAPH FAR RIGHT BY JOHN GESSNER

GALLERY

Toren Davis

Toren Davis explores the history of the Cape Fear region through his photography. He first discovered his passion for history as a child growing up in Arizona, when he found Native American pottery shards and arrowheads near his grandparents' home. He was fascinated by the physical remnants of past generations: "The idea that people lived in the same place and created the items I was holding generations before me was intriguing. The pieces they left behind told stories of who they were."

In a rapidly growing and changing world, Davis finds it important to capture signs of history before they are lost forever. It is important for him not just to record the history, but to make starkly black and white images that are as artful as they are creative.

Now a family physician in Wilmington, Davis's interest in photography blossomed about eight years ago. He enjoys using the medium to share the stories of areas he visits that have historical significance. "Along the way I enjoyed being able to capture images of these places, frozen in their time, while the world continues to grow around them," he says. Davis is particularly interested in juxtaposing historical remnants with the modern context in which they are often found.

"The Cape Fear River is the perfect mix of Wilmington's untouched past and its growth toward the future. The deteriorating and rusted ship hulls on one bank tell the story of where the city has been, while the growth and life on the other bank show where it is going. Being able to capture these stories with a photograph is something that continues to fascinate me, and being able to share this piece of Wilmington is something I'm very passionate about."

Argonauta and the Bridge: *The sunken boiler of the Argonauta rests with a trail of other shipwrecks leading to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge.*

Isco and the Tree: *The wooden hulled tugboat* Isco *collapsing on itself while a tree lining the river shares the same fate.*

The Dock: *This crumbling wood lined with iron are all that remains of one of the Stone Marine Railway docks.*

Sand and Sumner: *A section of wooden hull from the 1919 ship,* Sumner, *sleeps beneath the sand on Topsail Beach. The last voyage of this vessel is shrouded in mystery the captain died under unclear circumstances.*

Confederate Timbers: *Collapsing timbers line the bottom of a confederate defense trench just south of Wilmington. These timbers were once cut by the hands of a soldier long since passed from this earth. This trench has since been filled, burying the remaining rotting wood, by a recent modern development.*

Ghost Deck: *The deck of the PC-1084 peeking over and collapsing into the water of the Cape Fear River.*

Boilers and Steeples: *The deteriorating iron hull of the 1876 steam tugboat,* Argonauta, *resting on the western bank of the Cape Fear River. The steeples of Wilmington look on from the eastern bank.*

A Sacred Space

Deep in the woods of Forest Hills, Jodie Rippy has created an elegant sanctuary for her art

By William Irvine · Photographs by Rick Ricozzi

Amid the rows of sedate 1920s Colonial Revival and Tudor houses of Forest Hills, you will notice — if you have an eagle eye — an unobtrusive and shady driveway, surrounded by large underbrush on either side and a discreet house number. No property is visible. Upon entering this dark cave of green you quickly come into the light, passing a cheery Victorian-style glass greenhouse; and there, deep in the woods, is a cozy cottage, which serves as the art studio and part-time refuge of the Wilmington artist Jodie Rippy.

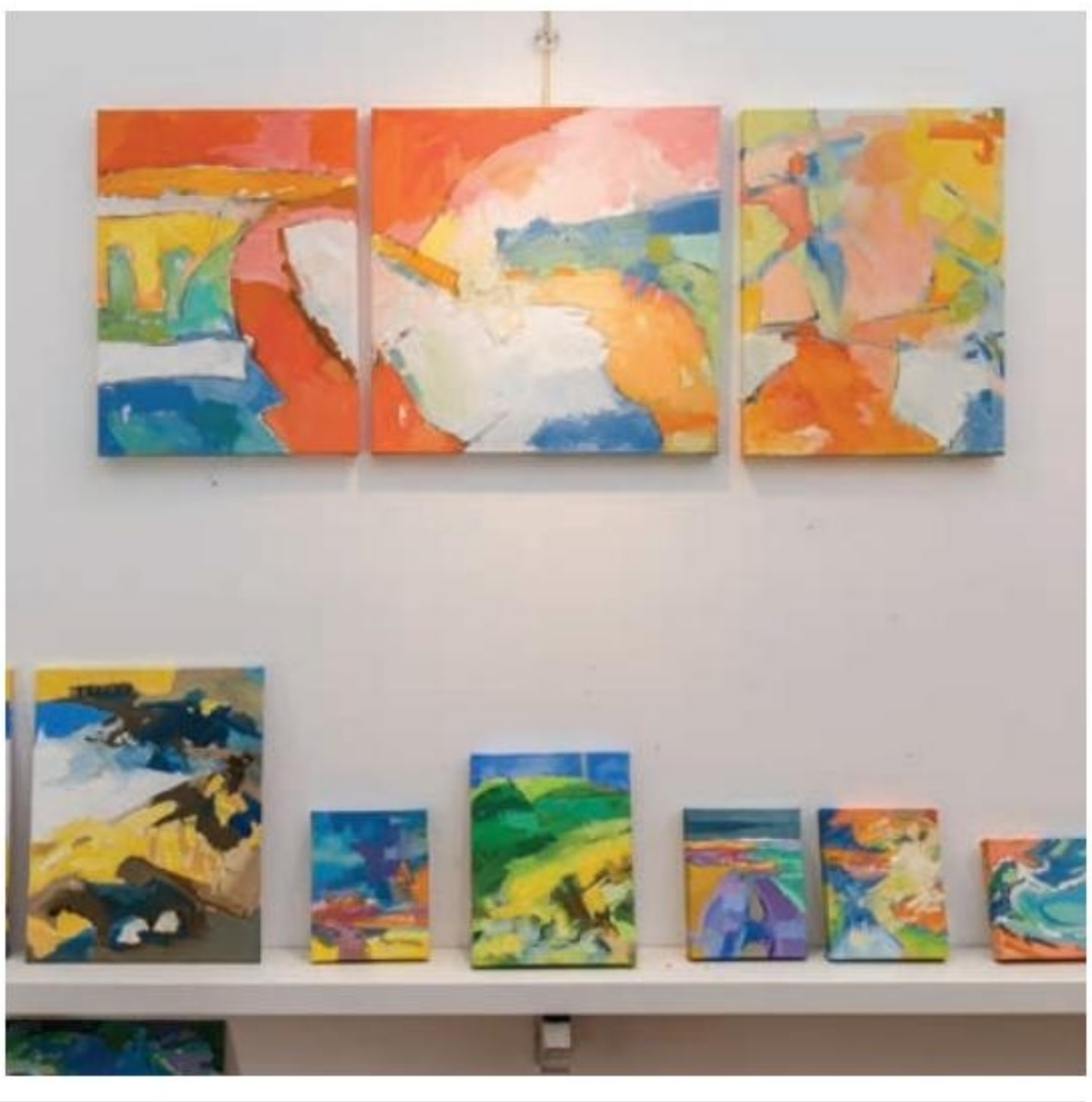
To call it a studio is only the beginning, says Rippy, who retreats here to work from her home in nearby Wrightsville Beach, where she and her husband have lived for the past 20 years; the studio was completed in 2006. "It's a multipurpose space — an area for my artwork, a place where I teach classes, a playroom for my grandchildren. We even came here for Christmas Eve dinner after church," she says with a smile. And the studio has also been used as a space for music and prayer. Christian musicians have performed here — "They tell me the acoustics are phenomenal" — and a clergyman has come here to pray and hold a silent vigil in the woods. It has also been used as a space for fundraisers for hospice and other charities. "So really it's a blessed space in more ways than one," says Rippy.

The approach to the studio is down a meandering walkway, created by her grandchildren, who embedded the pavement with a rainbow of pottery shards,

ADT

WAA

THE ART LOFT



brought back by Rippy from her painting trips to France, Italy and Portugal. "A few also came from the Vietri outlet near Hillsborough," she confesses. Upon entering the cottage, you are surrounded by sunlight and space — a vast two-story room which, in addition to Rippy's art studio, contains a small office and a staircase to a loft level and a bedroom. The largest wall features a cruciform arrangement of windows, all salvaged or rejects from local building suppliers. And the feeling is almost ecclesiastical: "A group of Hispanic guys helped with the builders, and they saw the cross formation of the windows and asked if it was a church, and I have always admired that," Rippy says. "I am a woman of faith, so that meant a lot to me."

The main room serves as Rippy's creative mission control, with long tables, painting easels and prepared palettes at the ready — evidence of a busy artist at work — as well as a storage rack for larger canvases. The plain white walls serve as a great space for hanging artworks in progress. An accomplished painter since childhood (at the age of 10 she proudly painted a portrait of Caroline Kennedy, which she sent directly to the president; a warm thank-you note from the White House followed), Rippy has studied with the American painters Wolf Kahn and Burton Silverman, among others, and in addition to museum exhibitions across the South her work appears in many private and corporate collections, including those of the Cameron Art Museum, Bank of America, and the late movie producer Dino de Laurentiis.

All the windows and doors and woodwork in the studio are the result of adaptive reuse: The interior doors were found at a local antiques shop; windows at the Historic Wilmington

Foundation's salvage store. The handsome Chinese Chippendale balcony railings were salvaged from the demolition of the old Cape Fear Country Club. To one side of the doorway is a pocket office with a large inspiration board of artworks and gallery invitations and postcards of favorite paintings that she has picked up on her travels. The desk is also recycled — it's a door purchased at the Habitat ReStore that Rippy faux-finished in a marbleized pattern. A ladder leads to the sleeping loft, which contains two full-size beds; another small bedroom hides behind a door off the front of the studio.

It's a surprise to move from this serene space into the stylish, cozy living room, one that would be at home in a much larger house. Furnished with a handsome chintz sofa and red leather wing chair, the centerpiece of the room is a large fireplace of burnished brick. "My daughter and I salvaged the bricks that surround the fireplace after our downtown dealership burned to the ground in an electrical fire," she says. There is a painting of the house on Park Avenue, where she and her husband raised their three children, who now all live in Wilmington (she also has eight grandchildren, frequent visitors to the studio). On the far wall hangs a collection of antique botanical prints from Charleston, and an antique wooden jelly cupboard serves as china and glassware storage. A small Pullman kitchen has a recycled heart-pine countertop and an old-fashioned sink, which Rippy found online. And on the wall, a large woodcut of a frog: "It's the first piece of art I ever bought — I was a college student at Peace College and it caught my eye and fit my budget."

I began to think that I wouldn't mind spending a quiet weekend here in the woods. It is such a calming place, extremely conducive to both serenity and creativity. "This space is my sanctuary," Rippy says. "It is where I work, create, recharge, retreat and become centered. We both are works in progress."

William Irvine is the senior editor of Salt.

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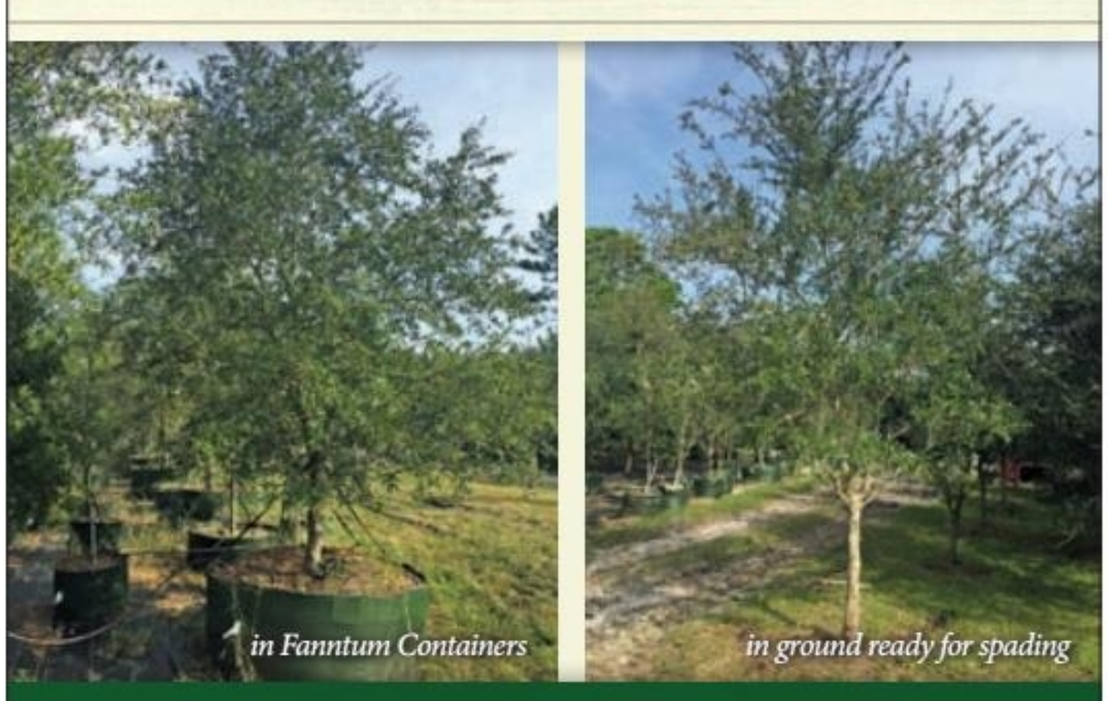
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ALMANAC

May

By Ash Alder

May and the heart sings of somersaults, cartwheels across the lawn, dandelions tucked behind the ears of children.

May is a month of sweetness.

The pick-your-own-strawberries, soft-spring-rain, butterflies-in-the-garden kind of sweetness.

And magnolia-blossoms-for-Mama.

In the garden: snow peas, fennel, broccoli, kale.

In the kitchen: bearded iris in a pail.

May is a month for sweethearts — and dancing.

Dancing round maypoles, dancing round in circles, dancing round the Beltane fire.

The first maypoles were made of hawthorn, a mystical tree which the ancient Celts believed could heal a broken heart.

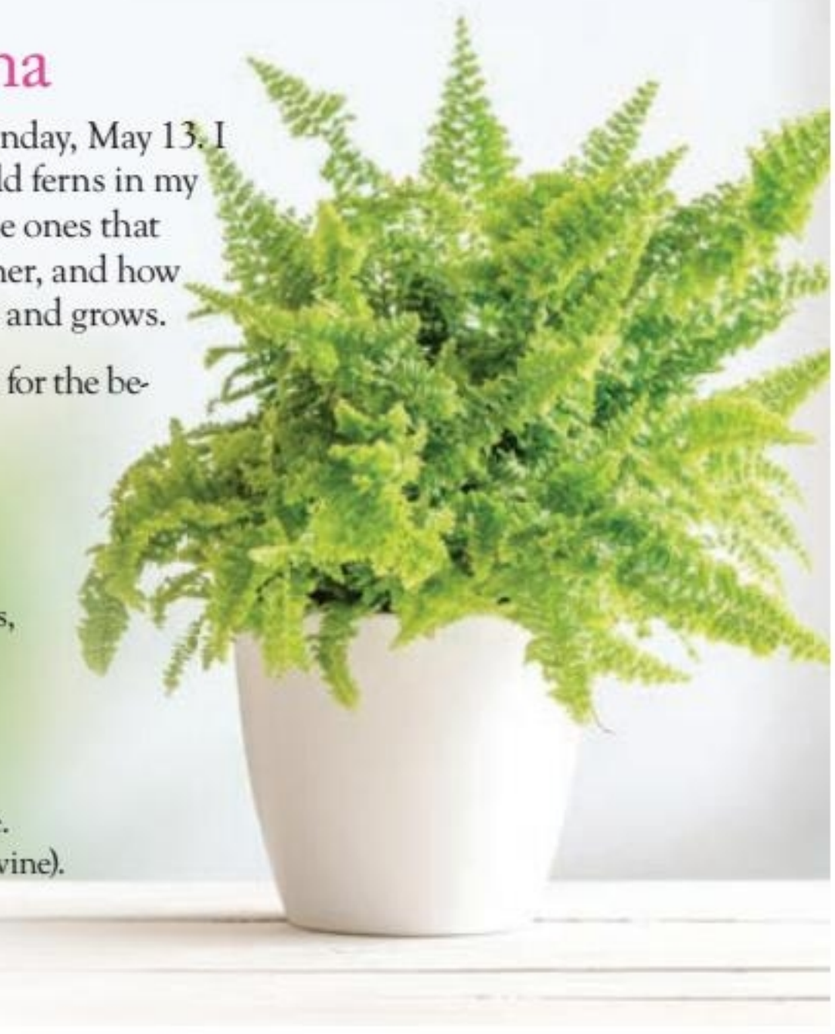
Breathe in spring and feel your heart somersault, hopscotch, send a flurry of dandelion seeds whirling as it cartwheels through a field of sweetness.

Gifts for Mama

Mother's Day falls on Sunday, May 13. I think of the hundred-year-old ferns in my grandmother's sunroom, the ones that belonged to her florist mother, and how love, when nurtured, grows and grows.

A few seeds of inspiration for the beloved matriarch in your life:

Sprig of dogwood.
Pickled magnolia petals.
Lemon basil.
Bulbs for the garden: dahlias,
wild ginger,
climbing lily.
Stepping stones.
Wildflower crown.
Peach, pear or nectarine tree.
Basketful of dandelion (for wine).
Eternal love.



The world's favorite season is the spring.
All things seem possible in May.

— Edwin Way Teale

The Full Flower Moon rises on Tuesday, May 29. Also called Mother's Moon, Milk Moon and Corn Planting Moon, this month's moon illuminates the whitetail fawns, wide-eyed owlets, wildflowers everywhere.

According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, the best days for planting above-ground crops this month are May 18, 19, and 26–28. Plant below-ground crops May 9 or 10.

Plan now for July sweet corn on the grill.

Pickled Magnolia Flowers

Try this to add a side of whimsy to your spring salad.

Ingredients

One pound fresh young magnolia flowers
1 1/2 cups rice vinegar
One cup of sugar
One teaspoon of salt

Directions

Wash and dry petals, then put them in a sterilized jar with salt.

Mix rice vinegar and sugar in pan, then bring to boil.

Pour hot vinegar and sugar mixture over flowers. Allow to cool, then cap the jar.

Spring — an experience in immortal
— Henry D. Thoreau

Wrightsville Beach Museum at Myers Cottage

May 19, 11am-2pm – Royal Wedding Fundraiser
Celebrate Harry and Meghan's Day at the Museum: Classic British Car Show, picnic lunch - bring your own or order ahead, make your own fascinator, cutting of the wedding cake and games on the lawn. Tickets available at the door. Must order a picnic lunch before 5/16 - 910-256-2569 or wbmuseum@bizec.rr.com.

June 3, 1-4pm, Membership Open House
Live music on the porch, a food truck and family activities. Special member discount in the gift shop. Members who bring a friend who joins qualify for a special drawing! Call for more information 910-256-2569.

- **Daily Lemonade on the Porch begins May 22**
- **Summer Family Activities begin June 1**
- **Walking Tours begin June 9**
- **Come by 24/7 to hunt shark's teeth by the lifeguard memorial stand**
- **Wright Holman Shrimperoo at Causeway Café** – details coming soon. Watch online www.wbmuseumofhistory.com

Watch the progress on the museum's 1924 Ewing-Bourdeaux Cottage

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The 5th Annual Wilmington Jewish Film Festival

April 22-24, April 29-May 1, May 5-6, 2018

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Feature Film Schedule Continues:

SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 1 PM.....My Hero Brother
(All tickets for this film - $5)
SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 7 PM.....1945
MONDAY, APRIL 30, 7 PM.....Shalom Italia
TUESDAY, MAY 1, 7 PM .....Defiant Requiem
SATURDAY, MAY 5, 7 PM.....Humor Me
SUNDAY, MAY 6, 3 PM.....Past Life

To purchase tickets or for more information on selected shorts & reception times, visit wilmingtonjff.org

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Arts Calendar

Brits at the Battleship Car Show

5/4-5

Jay Leno at the Wilson Center

5/15

Compton and Newberry Concert

5/24

5/1 RAIN: A Tribute to the Beatles
7:30 p.m. Celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, one of the Beatles' most acclaimed albums, with a tribute band that carries on the spirit of the Beatles. RAIN has now been together for longer than the Beatles and has mastered their style while offering a live performance to songs that were only recorded in the studio. Tickets: $38-89. The Wilson Center, 703 North Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or www.capefearstage.com.

5/1, 5/5-6 Wilmington Jewish Film Festival
7 p.m. – 9 p.m. (Tuesday - Saturday); 3 p.m. – 5 p.m. (Sunday). The Wilmington Jewish Film Festival promotes a deeper understanding of Jewish history and contemporary Jewish culture and hopes to inspire appreciation for the various forms of Jewish identity. Admission: $7-17. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or www.wilmingtonjewishfilmfestival.org.

5/4-5 The Upscale Resale and Design Challenge VIP Night
6 p.m. – 9 p.m. 22 local designers stage 10 x 10 vignettes using repurposed merchandise and home furnishings from Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity's ReStore. The vignettes will be reviewed by celebrity judges. Food and beverages are included in the price of the ticket. Admission: $35-40. The ArtWorks, 200 Willard St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 762-4744 or www.capefearhabitat.org.

5/4-5 Brits at the Battleship Car Show
7 p.m. – 10 p.m. (Friday); 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. (Saturday). Join the British Motor Club of the Cape Fear as they celebrate their 20th anniversary by bringing the best classic British car show in southeastern North Carolina to the battleship USS North Carolina. Featuring raffles, live music, and more. Admission: Free. USS North Carolina Battleship Park, 1 Battleship Road Northeast, Wilmington. Info: www.bmccf.org.

5/5 Carolina Beach Street Arts Festival
10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Celebrate the arts by the sea with the family-friendly Carolina Beach Street Arts Festival, featuring regional art vendors, interactive demonstrations, live performances, and more. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Blvd., Carolina Beach. Info: (610) 909- 7643.

5/8 National Theatre Live
2 p.m. UNCW and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute will host a performance of *Young Marx*, a satirical look at the 32-year-old revolutionary down on his luck in 1850s London. The production will be broadcast live from the Bridge Theater in London. Admission: $6-20. Kenan Auditorium, 515 Wagner Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 962-3500.

5/8 Handbell Choir Concert
7 p.m. Join the Presbyterian College's P.C. Ringers for an evening of music, featuring five octaves of handbells and seven octaves of chimes. Admission: Free. Winter Park Presbyterian Church, 5401 Wrightsville Ave., Wilmington. Info: (910) 791-5893 or www.winterparkpres.org.

5/8 Over 50s Dance
7:30 p.m. – 10 p.m. Dance to the fantastic ballroom, social and line dance selections of DJ Dan Chop at the Over 50s Dance. Couples and singles are welcome. Admission: $8. New Hanover County Senior Resource Center, 2222 S. College Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 620-8427 or www.overfiftiesdanceclub.org.

5/9 Airlie Gardens Monthly Bird Hike
8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Airlie Gardens' diverse habitats and large natural areas offer some of the best birding in New Hanover County, with nearly 200 species of birds recorded. Bring binoculars if you have them. Tickets: Included

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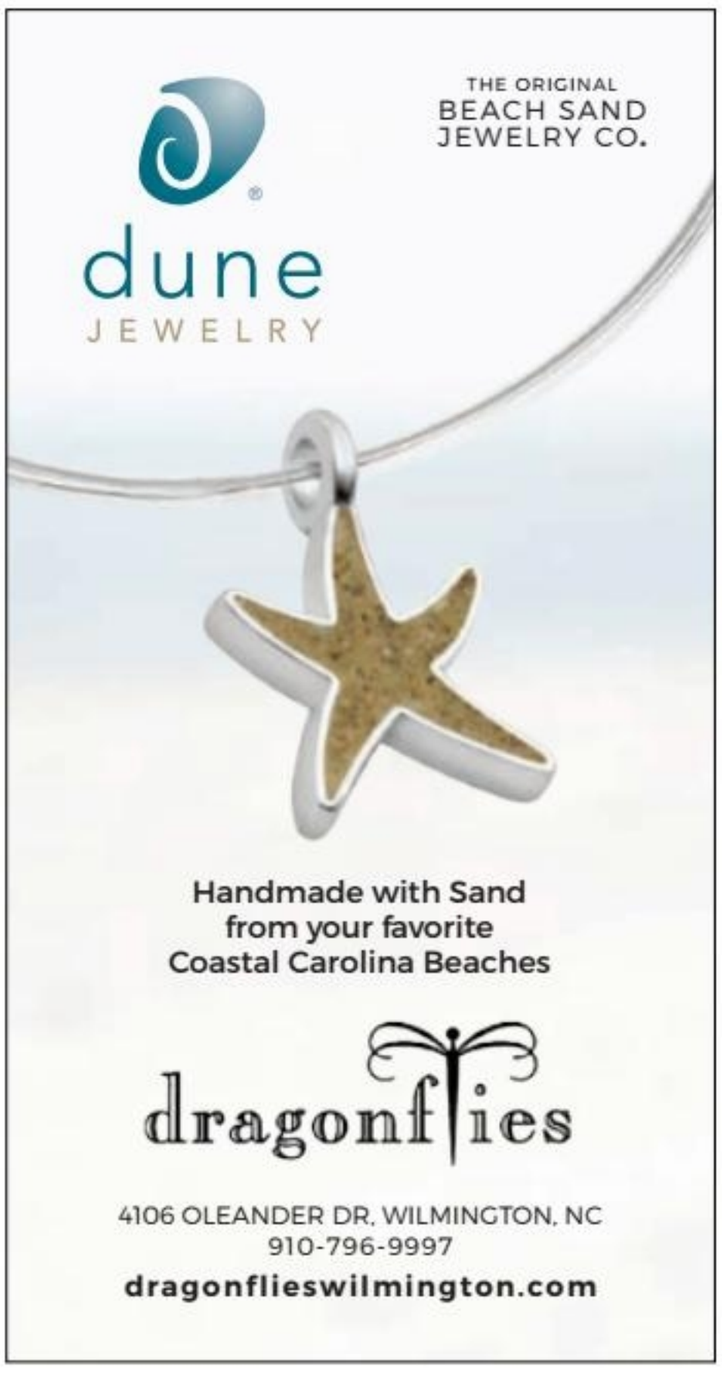

with garden admission. Airlie Gardens, 300 Airlie Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-7700 or www.airliegardens.org.

5/9 Buddy Guy in Concert
6-9 p.m. Legendary bluesman and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Buddy Guy will perform in concert at Greenfield Lake Amphitheater. Admission: $60. 1941 Amphitheater Drive, Wilmington. For more info: 910-343-3614.

5/10 Steve Forbert in Concert
7 p.m. TheatreNOW presents legendary singer and guitarist Steve Forbert in concert. Forbert's tribute to Jimmie Rogers, "Any Old Time," was nominated for a Grammy award in 2004. Admission: $20-25. TheatreNOW, 19 S. 10th St., Wilmington. For info: (910)-399-3669.

5/11 2nd Annual Thalian Hall Bluegrass Bash
6:00 p.m. (Food trucks & beer tasting); 7:30 p.m. (Concert). An evening of bluegrass music, local food, and craft beer featuring the best local talent Wilmington has to offer. Admission: $10–20. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or www.thalianhall.org.

5/12 Cape Fear Bluegrass and BBQ Festival
11 a.m. – 7:30 p.m. Five bands throughout the day, North Carolina-style BBQ and local craft beer make for a terrific all-day event. Enjoy live music, delicious food, and more at this annual festival. Admission: $5; free for children 12 and under. Saint Basil Church, 4601 Blue Clay Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 805-0981 or www.capefearbluegrass.org.

5/12-13 North Carolina Wildflower Festival
9 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Saturday); 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Sunday). The North Carolina Wildflower Festival features food and craft vendors, giant inflatables, helicopter rides, and live entertainment. A portion of proceeds benefit Rocky Point Elementary School. Admission: $3; free for moms and children under 11. Old Homestead Farm, 8824 US 117, Rocky Point. Info: (910) 233-8017 or www.rockypointfestivals.com.

5/13 The Illusionists
4 p.m. Direct from Broadway, the world's best-selling magic show is coming to Wilmington. The performance showcases the talents of five of the best illusionists on Earth. The show has broken box office records across the globe and impressed audiences of all ages. Tickets: $30 and up. The Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or www.capefearstage.com.

5/15 Jay Leno at the Wilson Center
7:30 p.m. Emmy winner, TV host, stand-up comedian, author, speaker and philanthropist Jay Leno is coming to the Wilson Center. Tickets: $46-136. The Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or www.capefearstage.com.

5/17 10th Annual WILMA Dash
6:30 p.m. This all-female 5K run/walk begins at the Coastline Convention Center and features a Health Fest afterparty with food and health assessments. Proceeds benefit Going Beyond the Pink. Admission: $25-50. Coastline Conference and Events Center, 503 Nutt St., Wilmington. For info: its-go-time@wilma-dash/.

5/18-20 Wilmington Greek Festival
11 a.m. – 10 p.m. (Friday and Saturday); 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Sunday). Join the Greek community of Wilmington for a celebration of Greek culture and heritage, including authentic food, music, dancing, and a marketplace. Admission: $3. St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, 608 S. College Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 392-4444 or www.stnicholasgreekfest.com.

5/18-20 Wilmington Wine and Food Festival
6:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. (Friday); 2 p.m. – 5 p.m. (Saturday); 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. (Sunday). Experience the exquisite food and wine pairings from top area chefs during this local festival. Enjoy traditional Southern BBQ at the Bourbon & BBQ Derby Cocktail Party, taste selections from more than a dozen Cape Fear Regional restaurants and 150 wine distributors from around the world, and end your weekend with live music, local breweries, food trucks and sparkling wines. Admission: Prices vary per event. See website for details. Bellamy Mansion, 503 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 385-9463 or www.wilmingtonwineandfood.com.

5/19-20 Rims on the River
11 a.m. - 5 p.m. The 43rd annual car show and awards ceremony features top-of-the-line vintage vehicles. Awards ceremony Saturday at 4 p.m. at N. Front and Chestnut streets. Admission: Free. Front St., Wilmington. For info: www.rimsontheriver.com.

5/20 Sing Me to Heaven

4 p.m. Join the Wilmington Choral Society for an evening of music as it concludes its 67th season with a spring matinee featuring John Rutter's modern classic *Requiem* and Gabriel Fauré's "Cantique de Jean Racine." Admission: $16–20. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or www.wilmingtonchoralsociety.com.

5/24 Compton and Newberry Concert

7:30 p.m. Singers Mike Compton and Joe Newberry, of *Prairie Home Companion* fame, put on an old country and blues show to remember, featuring a variety of original songs and covers. Admission: $20–36. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or www.thalianhall.org.

5/25-27 SilverArts Public Exhibition and Sale

10 a.m. – 4 p.m. (Friday and Saturday); 12 p.m. – 4 p.m. (Sunday). SilverArts, a component of the NC Senior Games, is a statewide art competition for adults 50 and older. The Wilmington Art Association invites you to support the creative spirit and talent of local artists. Admission: Free. ArtWorks, 200 Willard St., Wilmington. Info: www.ncseniorgames.org.

5/26-27 Orange Street ArtsFest

10 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Saturday); 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. (Sunday). Kick off summer with the 23rd annual street fair featuring over 80 artists from North Carolina and surrounding states, live entertainment, refreshments, and more. Admission: Free. Donations appreciated. Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center, 120 S. Second St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1788 or www.thalian.org.

6/1 WARM's 8th Annual Raise the Roof Gala and Auction

7 p.m. Come celebrate with WARM at this year's Havana Nights-themed gala and auction, featuring live music by the L-Shape Lot, live and silent auctions, and tropical drinks and cuisine. Admission: $100 per person; $900 for a 10-seat table. Holiday Inn Resort - Wrightsville Beach, 1706 N. Lumina Ave., Wrightsville Beach. Info: www.warmraisetheroof.org.

WEEKLY HAPPENINGS

Monday Wrightsville Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside beach market offering a variety of fresh, locally grown produce, baked goods, plants and unique arts and crafts. Seawater Lane, Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-7925 or www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com.

Tuesday Wine Tasting

6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free wine tasting hosted by a wine professional plus small plate specials all night. Admission: Free. The Fortunate Glass, 29 S. Front St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 399-4292 or www.fotunateglass.com.

Tuesday Cape Fear Blues Jam

8 p.m. A night of live music performed by the area's best Blues musicians. Bring your instrument and join in the fun. Admission: Free. The Rusty Nail, 1310 South Fifth Ave., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1888 or www.capefearblues.org.

Wednesday Free Wine Tasting at Sweet n Savory Cafe

5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sample delicious wines for free. Pair them with a meal, dessert, or appetizer and learn more about the wines of the world. Live music starts at 7. Admission: Free. Sweet n Savory Cafe, 1611 Pavilion Place, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-0115 or www.swetnsavorycafe.com.

Wednesday Weekly Exhibition Tours

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. A weekly tour of the iconic Cameron Arts Museum, featuring presentations about the various exhibits and the selection and installation process. Cameron Arts Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartsmuseum.org.

Wednesday Ogden Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Local farmers, producers and artisans sell fresh fruits, veggies, plants, eggs, cheese, meat, honey, baked goods, wine, bath products and more. Ogden Park, 615 Ogden Park Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/events-calendar/ogden-farmers-market.

Wednesday Poplar Grove Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Open-air market held on the front lawn of historic Poplar Grove Plantation offering fresh produce, plants, herbs, baked goods and handmade artisan crafts. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 Us Highway 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.poplargrove.org/farmers-market.

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Thursday — **Wrightsville Beach Brewery Farmers Market**

2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Come support local farmers and artisans every Thursday afternoon in the beer garden at the Wrightsville Beach Brewery. Shop for eggs, veggies, meat, honey, and handmade crafts while enjoying one of the Brewery's tasty beers. Stay for live music afterwards. Admission: Free. Wrightsville Beach Brewery, 6201 Oleander Dr., Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-4938 or www.wbbeer.com.

Thursday — **Yoga at the CAM**

12–1 p.m. Join in a soothing retreat sure to charge you up while you relax in a beautiful, comfortable setting. Sessions are ongoing and are open to both beginners and experienced participants. Admission: $5–8. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartmuseum.org.

Friday & Saturday — **Cape Fear Museum Little Explorers**

10 a.m. Meet your friends in Museum Park for fun, hands-on activities! Enjoy interactive circle time, conduct exciting experiments, and play games related to a weekly theme. Perfect for children ages 3 to 6 and their adult helpers. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Museum, 814 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-4370 or www.capefearmuseum.com.

Friday & Saturday — **Blackwater Adventure Tours**

Join in an educational guided boat tour from downtown Wilmington to River Bluffs, exploring the mysterious beauty of the Northeast Cape Fear River. See website for schedule. River Bluffs, 1100 Chair Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 623-5015 or www.riverbluffsliving.com.

Saturday — **Carolina Beach Farmers Market**

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Outdoor "island-style" market featuring live music and local growers, producers and artisans selling fresh local produce, wines meats, baked goods, herbal products and handmade crafts. Carolina Beach Lake Park, Highway 421 & Atlanta Ave., Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 458-2977 or www.carolinabeachfarmersmarket.com.

Saturday — **Riverfront Farmers Market**

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside market featuring local farmers, producers, artisans, crafters and live music along the banks of the Cape Fear River. Riverfront Park, N. Water St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtondowntown.com/events/farmers-market.

Saturday — **Taste of Downtown Wilmington**

2:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., & 3:15 p.m. A weekly gourmet food tour by Taste Carolina, featuring some of downtown Wilmington's best restaurants. Each time slot showcases different food. See website for details. Admission: $55–75. Riverwalk at Market Street, Wilmington. Info: (919) 237-2254 or www.tastecarolina.net/wilmington/.

To add a calendar event, please contact calendar@saltmagazinenc.com. Events must be submitted by the first of the month, one month prior to the event.

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Port City People

Roast on the Coast

A Benefit for the Junior League of Wilmington

Saturday, March 24, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Rob Bryan, Meghan Donovan

Luke Faulkenberry, Lauren Long, Gordon Burnett, Mekenzie Bazen

Robert Dixon, Meghan Purdy

Trey Milligan, Brooke Laisier

Katherine Ransdell, Kendra Douglas, Marien Stark, Sofia Fanti

Caroline Kemmerer, Meghan Osborne

Andrew Golightly, Alex Leviner

Kathryn & Sam Schey

James Todd, Janison Dillon, Andrew Penny, Travis Quinn

Jessica Edwards, Carolyn Burnes, Tori Harless, Casey Cochran

Andy Mitwol, Tasha Lehman

Steven Barrett, Lisa Valentine

Port City People

Royal Affair Gala

22nd Annual Landfall Foundation Gala

Saturday, April 7, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Sasha Sadler, Parran Spivey, Emily Lawler

Kelly Pittman, Dick Soffe, Ashley Miller

Cecelia Marrese, Carol Earey

Linda & Henry Brown, Michelle Clark

Andy & Ann Simpson

Kristen Harmon, Lynn Hildreth, Beth Magrath

Carl Roark, John & Jessica Spencer, Linda Wilson

George & Julie Wesoloski

Pia Ann Robison, Bill Hamlin

Ken Trojniar, Tom & Annette Clifford

Angela Mackinnon; Joan Payne

Mearlean White, Karen Rogalski, Ginger Wilson

Port City People

Bellamy in Bloom Spring Tea

Bellamy Mansion

Sunday, April 8, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Donna Hurdle, Linda Gould

Connie Parker, Tricia Wilson

Darlene Pipkin, Holly Niebauer

Doris, Shirley & Hannah Niebauer

Anne Isbell, Joan Tertzakian, Boo Bayne, Susan Strode

Merle Lenz, Diane Matz-Kane

Elizabeth Strickland, June Dibona

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City Market – 119 S. Water St.

Famous Toastery – 6722 Wrightsville Ave.

Johnny Mercer Pier – 25 E. Salisbury

New Hanover Public Library – 1960 S. 16th St.

Post Office – 206 Causeway Dr.

Causway Cafe – 114 Causeway Dr.

All Harris Teeters in the Wilmington Area

Port City People

"The Queen's Tea" of the 2018 Azalea Festival

Hotel Ballast

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Peyton Phillips, Montgomery Lanier

Jacob Shaver, Sam Shaffer, John Mobley, Corey Atkins

Taylor Cuthbertson, Abby Britt, Taylor Foley, Megan Huff

Victoria Huggins

Mollie Campana

Ben Fields, Joey Brown, Liam Burke, Niles Tate

Laura Matrazzo, Carli Batson, Shanice Street, Autumn Hubbard

Haven Lewis

Lisa Griesser

Claire Mansfield, Alison Fowler, Haley Granger, Lexis Henderson, Francesca Calabria

Kelly Baker

Reagon Radford, Claudia Webb, Grace Tippett, Jamie Barricelli, Caroline Shaver

Abigale Hawkins, Meghan Stello, Alexandra Durham

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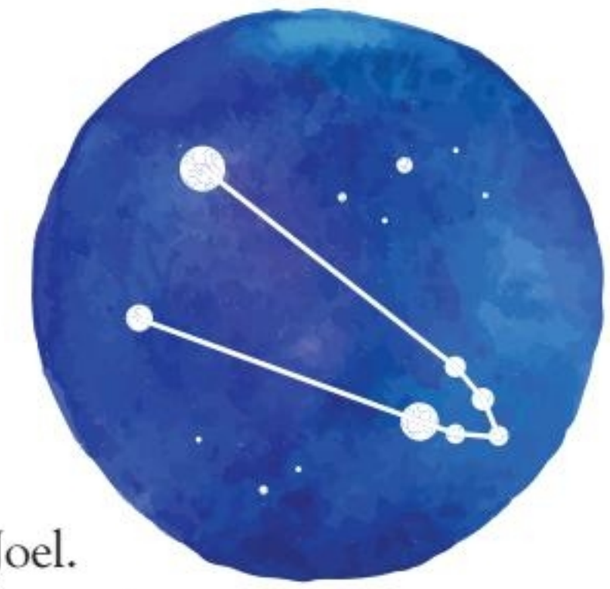
Bull Session

The life of a Taurus is always intense



By Astrid Stellanova

Queen Elizabeth and Ted Kaczynski. Willie Nelson and Billy Joel. Karl Marx and Malcom X. Tina Fey and Adele. Cher and Bono (U2 front man, not Cher's late ex husband Sonny). That's right, Star Children: These are Taurus babies who are all just a tee-ninesy bit intense and take to a stage, pulpit, or even the witness stand like a ducky takes to a daisy. The emerald? A pretty intense birthstone that makes it just right, don'tcha think? This is a month to end bad juju, make amends, dream bigger and dazzle with a smile. Ad Astra — Astrid

Taurus (April 20–May 20)
Sugar, you could be on your deathbed arguing about the guest list for your own funeral. Sometimes you are a pragmatic soul. At others, you go psycho over some little detail that flips you out and trips all the circuits. Take yourself for a little lunchtime walk or get your hands in the soil. Let nothing come between you and your joy this month.

Gemini (May 21–June 20)
If you don't do anything else, accept a gift that is offered to you. Ain't going to change the person who always gets you riled, so just live and learn, and move up the line. You're a natural trendsetter, who will find yourself making an imprint. The second act of your life was always meant to be especially important.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)
Lordy! You started out saying you wanted to risk it for the biscuit, then you backed down. Don't let anybody stop you this time — make your mind up to put some steel in your backbone, Honey. You have given much more than you'll ever take — your moment has come and the reward is deserved. Also, say yes to that trip.

Leo (July 23–August 22)
It won't take a slide rule for you to calculate how many hours you have wasted on the wrong partner. It seems you overcommitted. Now, just try a little undercommitment. Sugar, I'm just warning you that you have been dropping the bucket down the wrong well. Your reward is waiting in an unexpected location.

Virgo (August 23–September 22)
If you were just honest about it, being uppity is not working for you. By your standards, paper towels are white trash, too. Why don't you practice a little more acceptance, because all this social maneuvering, posturing and aspiring just makes you look silly and feel lonely. And you don't handle lonely.

Libra (September 23–October 22)
A confession is overdue. There is something you need to stop carrying on your shoulder 'cause it's not yours to bear, Love, and you don't need to carry it one more step. Confront the person you think you wronged and make amends. They will surprise you, and your health will improve afterward.

Scorpio (October 23–November 21)
You are spending more time alone than is usual, and maybe you like your own company. Make it your business to reach out, Honey, and touch somebody, just like the commercial says. Few people know you have a doozy of a secret. Open up. They can handle it, Love.

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)
The greatest adventure you ever took started at your front door. Only you understand what that means. Home is everything to you nowadays — far more than to most (and far more than to typically far-flung you!). It is also where you are finding your calm center in a very turbulent, topsy-turvy time. Rest up, Honey, because the adventure isn't quite over.

Capricorn (December 22–January 19)
In your fantasies about the life you shoulda-coulda-woulda had and the path you didn't take, there is always one particular dream on your mind. It has haunted you. This is a good time to take a step in realizing that dream, even if your rational self says it's nuts. It ain't. And, best of all, it ain't too late, Sweet Pea.

Aquarius (January 20–February 18)
You are having a phase of intense dreams that reveal issues and concerns helpful in your daily life. In many ways, you have been dreaming of the most meaningful and best ways to move forward. Keep a close record of those reveries for May and notice key information that your mind is offering.

Pisces (February 19–March 20)
Shew, you crossed the wrong person and they have not let it go, have they? You sure did poke the bear and now you are living to regret it. Give 'em a good bottle of whatever they like to drink or take them some blossoms, but for garsh sakes, end this thing! They may be wrong but holding out ain't worth it.

Aries (March 21–April 19)
Last month, you were given a birthday present that startled you and you haven't quite figured out its meaning. That may be a good thing. Someone you don't love in quite the same way as they feel toward you has been trying to worm their way into your heart. If you go there, it will flame out fast and cause more heartburn than passion, Baby.

For years, Astrid Stellanova owned and operated Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon in the boondocks of North Carolina until arthritic fingers and her popular astrological readings provoked a new career path.

Mole Talk

Small ears that hear everything

By Clyde Edgerton

Moby and Medley are moles, sitting at a table in the Sandbucks Coffee Shop, where they meet once a week to talk about life underneath and around the Yardley home. They hear a lot of what goes on up above among the humans and human media. They don't see, of course, and their lives are relatively dull, same-o same-o. Dirt, roots, dampness, clay, dryness and darkness.

MOBY: What's the latest?

MEDLEY: I'm writing an important report on Republicans and Democrats.

MOBY: How do you know about all that?

MEDLEY: I can hear. You know, don't you, that Mr. and Ms. Yardley, up above, are split?

MOBY: They're getting a divorce?

MEDLY: No, no. I mean one's a Democrat and one's a Republican.

MOBY: Seems I remember something about that.

MEDLEY: My report is getting reviewed in *The New York Times* and at Fox News.

MOBY: Those organizations don't like each other, right?

MEDLEY: Right. They see news differently.

MOBY: But isn't all news the same?

MEDLEY: Oh, goodness gracious, no. There's red news and there's blue news.

MOBY: I thought there was only true news.

MEDLEY: Not anymore. Everything is either-or. Left or right. Up or down. Black or white.

MOBY: I'm just glad I can't see. What color are we?

MEDLEY: I've heard that we are some shade of gray more or less. And did you know, the blues think all the reds are idiots.

MOBY: Really? What do the reds think of the blues?

MEDLEY: That they are all idiots.

MOBY: It's a shame, isn't it? Do they ever talk to each other?

MEDLEY: Not much. They holler. And they acted that way right before the Civil War, too.

MOBY: Oh, mercy. Do you think there will be another Civil War up there?

MEDLEY: No way.

MOBY: I wonder how the Yardleys live together — you know, one red and one blue.

MEDLEY: I think they talk only about sports, music, the weather and *Naked and Afraid*. They avoid politics.

MOBY: What's politics?

MEDLEY: "Naked and afraid."

MOBY: Oh. What about that Second Amendment thing?

MEDLEY: Have you read it?

MOBY: I just keep hearing about it.

MEDLEY: If you live in one of the 50 states it keeps you safe.

MOBY: Really? That's what it says.

MEDLEY: That's right. It says, "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

MOBY: That's all it says?

MEDLEY: That's the whole amendment, every word.

MOBY: That's a load off my mind. Who could be against that?

MEDLEY: Nobody, of course. It's common sense. The blue and reds agree on that one. Without that amendment we just couldn't feel secure.

MOBY: Is there an amendment that lets us buy cars?

MEDLEY: Oh, yes. That's the Third Amendment. And the Fourth Amendment lets us buy refrigerators. You can't own something unless there is an amendment for it.

MOBY: How did you learn all that?

MEDLEY: Google. You can hear Google now, so people don't have to read.

MOBY: So, what's the title of your report?

MEDLEY: It's called "Equality, Fair Play, Guns, Cars, and Refrigerators: Security in America." I also wrote some stuff about globalization. See, the more guns that get into the little states around the world, the more secure they will be — just like in the U.S.

MOBY: That's a load off my mind.

MEDLEY: Mine too. How about another cup of coffee?

MOBY: You bet. That's good coffee.

MEDLEY: Seventh Amendment: "Good coffee is necessary to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Clyde Edgerton is the author of 10 novels, a memoir and most recently, Papadaddy's Book for New Fathers. *He is the Thomas S. Kenan III Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at UNCW.*

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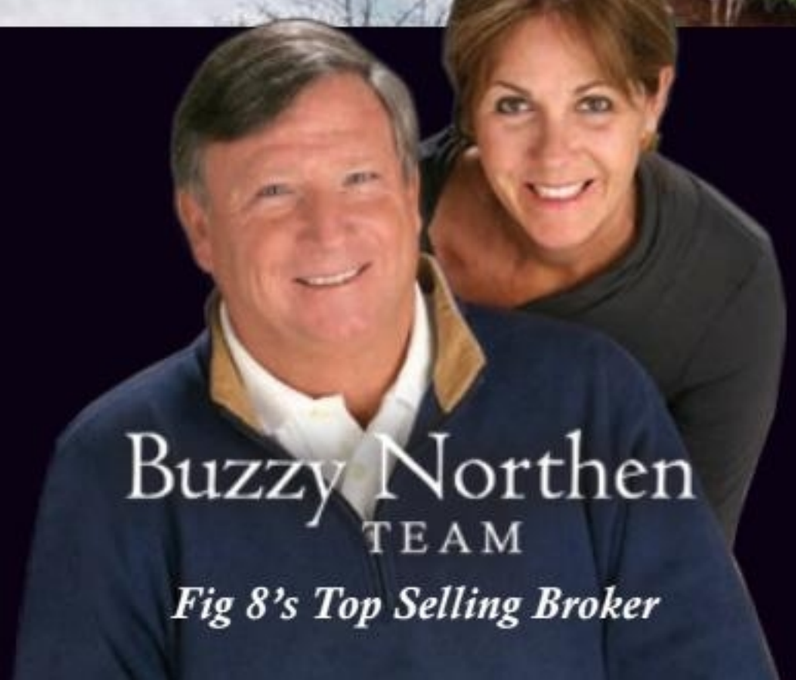

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